Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society Vol. 66 No. 1 2022

Private collection

About the Covers

The Welsh Bros. poster reproduced on *Bandwagon's* cover was recently offered at a Sotheby's auction in New York. An unidentified buyer disbursed $75,600 for this rare treasure – the highest amount ever known to have been paid for a circus poster. Of course, the interest in this particular lithograph was greatly enhanced due to its subject – Harry and Bess Houdini and their original "Metamorphosis" illusion.

National Printing & Engraving Co. of Chicago produced two similarly designed posters in 1898 – "Metamorphosis" and a portrayal of Houdini as the "King of Cards". Both were printed with the Welsh Bros. title as well as with a blank heading for Houdini's personal use. Surviving receipts issued by National substantiate that the young magician bought a supply of these posters for his own use in early 1898. Moreover, an entry in the October 29, 1898 *The New York Clipper* confirms that the Houdinis were offering these "Two special (4 col.) Lithos" to other potential employers immediately after their second Welsh tour ended.

National Printing & Engraving receipt, Tom Boldt Collection

Houdini's American circus experiences were a prelude to his blockbuster publicity-generating stunts performed around the world. Propelling him to greatness were handcuff escapes at Scotland Yard, daring performances in his water torture cell with Germany's Circus Busch and Corty-Althoff, as well as heart-pounding exits from packing crates lowered to the bottom of murky rivers.

No one has ever exceeded the fame Houdini achieved as an escape artist in the early years of the 20th century. He and his beloved Bessie appear on our back cover, photographed in London as that fame was soaring.

GTP

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The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

2022 Volume 66, Number 1

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Website and Back Issues

An index of *Bandwagon* articles from earlier issues is available online at www.circushistory.org. Back issues are available from the Office of Publication.

From the Editor

I remember very well my uncle, Tom Parkinson, telling me about a crusty Ringling-Barnum employee who was bestowed with the nickname "Straight-Ahead Willy."[1] Among other assignments, he worked in the marquee tent taking tickets as circus goers pressed through on their way to the big show. No matter what question patrons might ask, his response was always the same. Do they sell reserve seating inside the big top? "All seats straight ahead." Where are the toilets? "All seats straight ahead." Are the Wallendas back this year? "All seats straight ahead."

Straight ahead in this issue of *Bandwagon,* our first article relates the coinciding and interwoven stories of the Welsh Bros. Circus in the 1890s and Harry and Bess Houdini's two seasons performing with that Pennsylvania-based enterprise. New information is brought forth about both the show and its two young illusionists who were very favorably received in 1895 and 1898.

Next in line is Chris Berry's fourth installment of "There Used to Be a Circus Here." This time around it is "The Philadelphia Story" – a colorful chapter of circus history that spans from the days of America's earliest tented shows to present-day UniverSoul and others. Along the way are the important highlights and notable accounts of leading circuses under canvas that have set up and played in the City of Brotherly Love.

Julie Parkinson shares the incredible story of Lee Stevens' rise in the circus world and the remarkable successes he and Judy Stevens attained during their fabulous career with baboons, sea lions and so many other animals they presented in circuses and later with their Baboon Lagoon midway stage show.

In Part III of the John Pugh series, Lane Talburt addresses one of the more challenging periods in Pugh's early days as General Manager of Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. This segment addresses the stress-filled season of 1966, as well as the show's transitional period following Beatty's passing.

Did Harry and Bess Houdini enjoy their trouping days with the small rail show owned by the three Welsh brothers? Which famous 19th century showman called Philadelphia home? What was Lee Stevens' lifelong goal as a circus performer? Who was the veteran of the circus big top who maneuvered to take over full control of Beatty-Cole during John Pugh's first season as General Manager?

Where to find the answers? All seats straight ahead.

1. In his 1960 book *The Circus Kings* written with Alden Hatch, Henry Ringling North identified Straight-Ahead Willy as Willy Downing with whom North worked on the "front door" during the summer of 1926 while on vacation from Manlius Military Academy.

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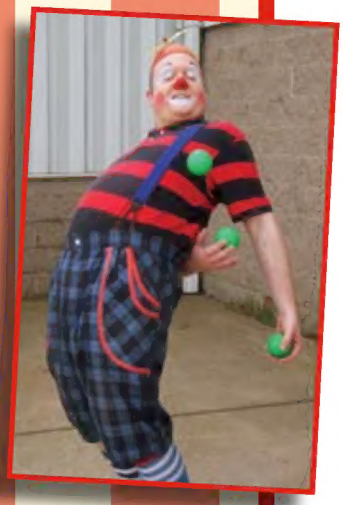

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Results of CHS Election

The results of the 2021 Circus Historical Society election were announced in early December. Incumbent trustees Richard Flint, Bruce Hawley, Fred Pfening and Al Stencell were each reelected to additional four-year terms. Newly elected trustees are Brian Hollifield, Betsy Golden Kellem and Stasia Kelly and who will each fill new four-year terms.

Following the election, Kristin Lee resigned from the Board of Trustees as well as her position as Secretary-Treasurer. To fill Lee's vacancy, the board nominated and elected Aíne Norris to serve out the remainder of the term.

At its meeting in December, the board elected a new slate of officers. The new officers are Bruce Hawley, President; Chris Berry, Vice President; David Carlyon, Treasurer; and Amelia Osterud (who is not a trustee), Secretary. The newly comprised Board of Trustees and new CHS officers are reflected in the listing on page 2.

For their tremendous service to the organization, a colossal thank you to outgoing President, Don Covington, Vice President Alan Campbell, and Secretary-Treasurer Kristin Lee, as well as trustee Deborah Walk.

Metamorphosis in the Sawdust Ring

Harry and Bess Houdini's Welsh Bros. Tours

by Greg Parkinson

Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society

Tom Boldt Collection

Long before Harry Houdini[1] arrived on the world stage as a practitioner of grand escapes – the likes of which had never before been attempted – he performed as a circus artist. Along with his 19-year-old wife, Beatrice, he made a season-long tour with Welsh Bros. Shows in 1895 and the two of them joined the circus again in 1898. This trouping experience was significant to Houdini's development as an entertainer and likely to the enhancement of his stage presence and charisma with audiences. However, his introduction to circus performing came at an earlier date.

Houdini himself and several magic historians have claimed the earliest of these performances occurred in 1883 when the young Wisconsinite was nine years old. Some sources also say this first appearance took place in Milwaukee, however, that seems unlikely.

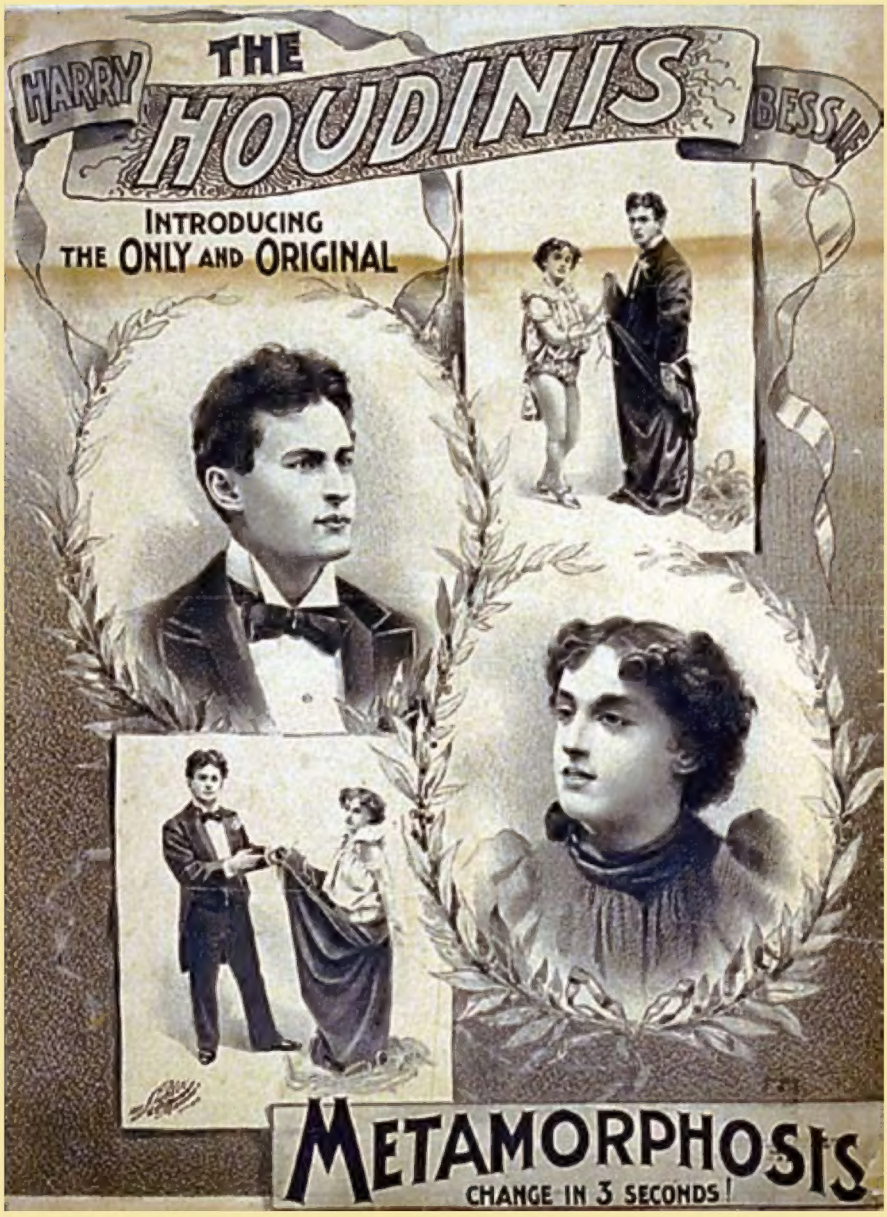
Internationally acclaimed by 1904, Houdini completed an interview that appeared in *The Appleton Crescent* on July 23:

> "My first performance? Well, I remember it well…It took place in an open field across the track in the Sixth ward and I did a contortionist act, giving three performances, for which Jack Hoeffler, who was managing then, as now, paid me exactly 35 cents."[2]

In 1910 Houdini expanded on his previous recollections of the event:

> "October 28, 1883, was the date of my first appearance before an audience. I appeared as a contortionist and trapeze performer, being advertised by the manager, Jack Hoeffler (now proprietor and manager of a circuit of theatres in the Middle West of the United States), as 'Ehrich, The Prince of the Air.'"[3]

Five years later, Houdini and Hoeffler granted a joint interview to the *St. Paul Dispatch* when the famed escape artist and his former childhood friend were reunited in St. Paul following a performance at the Orpheum Theatre. "'We lived in Appleton, Wis.,' said Mr. Hoeffler yesterday…'I had a 5 and 10 cent circus, and I used to give him a nickel a



Harry Houdini and Beatrice "Bessie" Rahner eloped on June 22, 1894 less than two weeks after they met at Coney Island. The first poster depicting their Metamorphosis performance was printed in 1895 by Liebler & Maass Lith. of New York. Library of Congress

day to do his stunts…'" Houdini added, 'I lived at home then with my parents…'"[4]

The St. Paul Dispatch article began by noting, "Thirty-four years ago Harry Houdini…started in show business." If the interviewer's account was accurate, that would have placed Houdini's first circus performance in 1881 when he was seven years old, and the family lived in Appleton. Thus, there is some uncertainty as to when and where Houdini made his circus debut.

Erik Weisz (later Houdini) had arrived in the United States with his mother, Cecilia, and four brothers on July 3, 1878.[5] The long journey from the Austro-Hungarian capital of Budapest continued until the Weisz family reunited with the boys' father, Mayer Samuel Weisz, in Appleton several weeks later. At the time of the 1880 Census, the family resided in dwelling number 97 on Appleton Street[6] near the intersection with College Avenue. Upon their arrival in New York or soon thereafter, each family member's name was changed to German spelling. Four-year-old Erik became Ehrich Weiss.

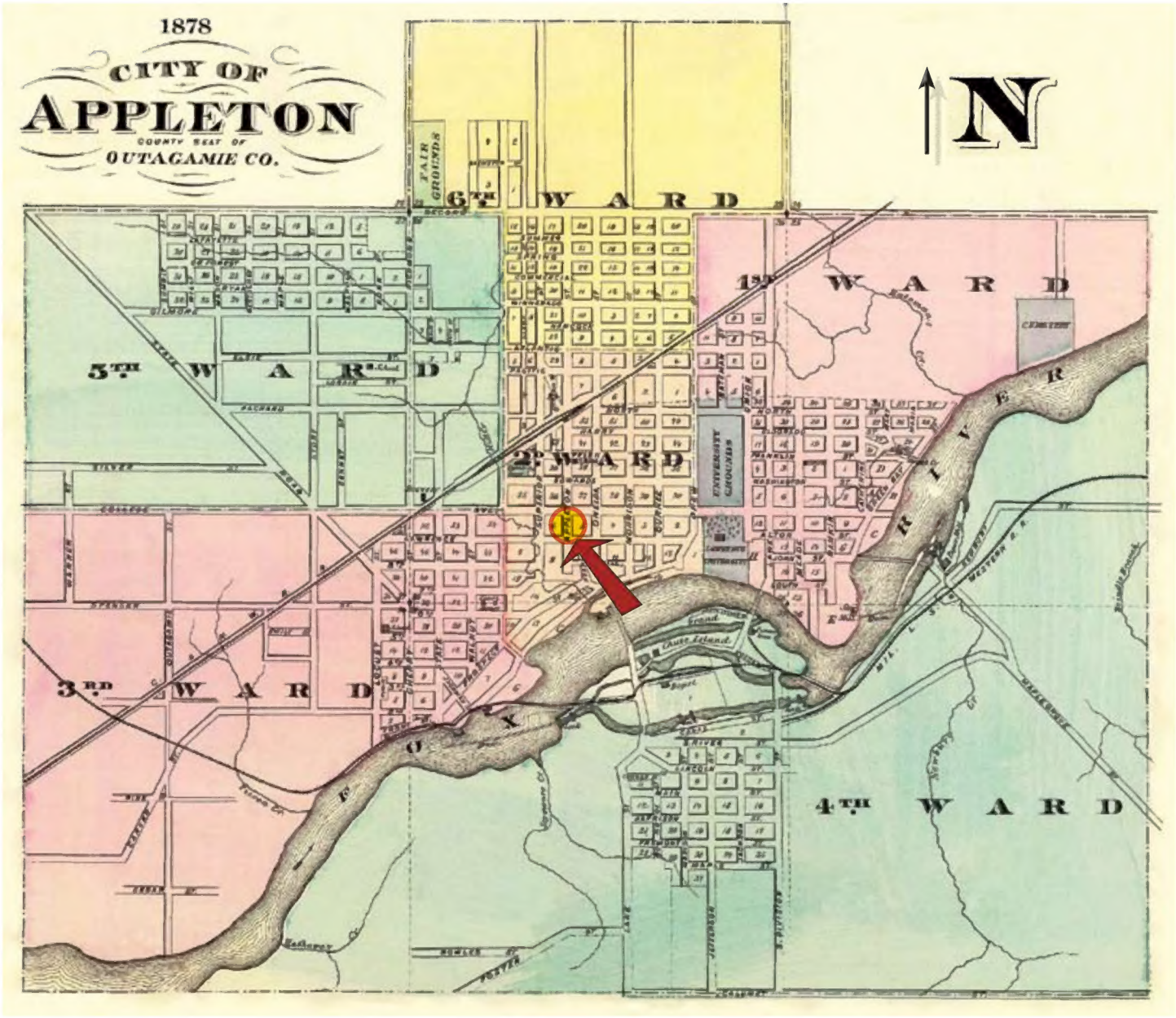
Houdini's father was removed from his job as the rabbi in Appleton, and he moved to Milwaukee in 1882. For some, this implied that Harry Houdini's earliest circus performances (allegedly in 1883) had to have been in Milwaukee. However, the 1915 *St. Paul Dispatch* interview clearly conveys that young Hoeffler's shows were offered in Appleton. The Weiss family residence was in fact in downtown Appleton where "open fields" in the Sixth Ward were just to the north across the Chicago and North Western railroad track.[7] No similar location fitting Houdini's 1904 description appears to have existed in Milwaukee in the early 1880s. Furthermore, Hoeffler's family lived in Appleton, not in Milwaukee. Had Houdini's recollection of the timeframe been mistaken? Had Cecilia and her children possibly remained in Appleton for some period of time after Rabbi Weiss left for Milwaukee? Had other unknown factors come into play?

It seems almost certain that Houdini's first circus performances were in Appleton, but the year and his age at the time remain unresolved. At any rate, the years in Appleton were few. Poverty followed the Weiss family to Milwaukee, and in 1887 Rabbi Weiss, his son, Ehrich, and other family members moved to New York City.

Although Houdini was paid for his first acrobatic performances, Hoeffler's circus was little more than a neighborhood, "backyard" show. More significant experiences with the American circus were on the horizon for Ehrich Weiss.

The Welsh brothers

Twenty-five years had passed since the end of the American Civil War when on May 1, 1890 the Welsh Bros. & Dock's Wagon Show opened in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.[8] In the same Piedmont hills and valleys of south-central Pennsylvania that surrounded the location where Union and Confederate forces had fought around Gettysburg, the Welsh circus began making its way overland from town to town. A slightly broader geography reaching into Maryland, southern New York and West Virginia, would serve as the show's base territory for much of the next quarter of a century.



The highlighted area on this map identifies the location of the Weiss residence on Appleton St. at the time of the U.S. Census in 1880. Ehrich Weiss's first circus performing "took place in the open field across the track in the 6th Ward" to the north.

Snyder, Van Vechten & Co.

The three brothers – John Thomas, Michael Henry and George A. – were children of George and Margaret Welsh who immigrated from Ireland in the mid-19th century.[9] In 1880, the Welsh boys had established a fruit stand in Lancaster. With money from that endeavor, they purchased a merry-go-round about 1888 and entered the entertainment business.[10]

In 1889, the Welsh brothers bought a cyclorama that depicted the catastrophic aftermath of the Johnstown flood that occurred earlier that year.[11] They presented this panoramic picture exhibit at fairs under a small tent. In the summer of 1889 while touring with the cyclorama, they encountered Martinho Lowande's circus in Hagerstown, Maryland.[12] Lowande's Brazilian Circus was in serious financial trouble. Partner "Peg" O'Brien had quit the enterprise and taken all the animals, leaving "the debts for Mr. Lowande to settle."[13] Informed that Lowande desired to sell his circus assets, the Welsh men paid about $950 for the tents, seats, lights, wagons, cook house and some of the horses. This equipment and livestock would serve as a basis for their own new show the following spring.[14]

The inaugural performance of the Welsh brothers' circus was offered on a Thursday afternoon at the corner of Mulberry and Vine streets in Lancaster.[15] The show was "an outfit of the smaller type," and it played on four different lots in the city of about 32,000.[16] It started as a ten-cent show and continued with this admission price for years to come.[17]

The New York Clipper reported that the circus would use a 90-foot round-top tent and would travel by wagon.[18] That first season the Welsh show utilized some 22 horses, a bandwagon and eight or nine smaller wagons. There was no menagerie, and the show had no animal acts. All of the physi-

cal equipment was said to have been placed in the name of George Welsh who in turn allegedly leased the assets to his older brothers John and Michael. All three brothers traveled with the show.[19] George Welsh served as treasurer of the circus, John was the advance agent, and Michael was the general manager. John and Michael were publicized as equal owners and directors.

Contemporary newspaper accounts claimed the Welsh performance tent had seating for 2,000 spectators. This could not have been possible in the show's 90-foot round top. The circumference of such a tent would have been about 283 feet. With six to eight rows of bleachers and/or "star-backs" along with the areas required for public and performer entrances, basic geometric calculations lead to the realization that the seating capacity would probably have been in the range of 500 to 600. Of course, more could have been "strawed" in any open areas in front of the bleachers.

It might be surmised that the reused Lowande tent was in poor condition from the start of the 1890 season, because a new striped 90-foot round tent was received on July 2 only two months after the opening in Lancaster.[20]

Ehrich Weiss becomes Houdini

Welsh Bros. continued as an overland wagon show using the small round-top tent for its first three seasons. In the early part of the third season, the brothers added five new wagons including a bandwagon.[21] The year before, Ehrich Weiss began his magic career and started calling himself Houdini, a name inspired by French illusionist Jean-Eugene Robert-Houdin. Houdini's earliest magic performances were accomplished with Jacob Hyman, a fellow working-class employee at H. Richter's Sons in Manhattan.[22] Harry and "Jake" began advertising themselves as The Brothers Houdini in 1891, and in 1893 the two performed briefly at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The partnership ended shortly thereafter, and "Professor" Harry Houdini began to perform occasionally with his real brother, Theodore "Dash" Weiss.

In the spring of 1893, the Welsh brothers sold their show to Thomas Humphreville, George Whitby and Harry Mohn.[23] The new owners continued to operate the Welsh show as an overland circus that season, but a year later in April 1894 one of the Lancaster papers reported that the enterprise would "travel by railroad, and not by wagons, as in former years."[24] Humphreville and his partners apparently struggled from the start of the 1894 season, and spring floods caused the cancellation of some performances. Newspaper ads for "Welsh Bros.' Big & Great City Show" appeared in Harrisburg for a four-day engagement there commencing on May 23.[25] However, the circus "fell into the hands of the sheriff" in the Pennsylvania capital. When the sale took place, the Welsh men bought it back.

John and Michael Welsh learned of another small show that had also run into financial problems and folded in Baltimore during the early going of its season. They bought that circus as well, contracting most of its performers and sending its tents and equipment to York in two Pennsylvania Railroad baggage cars. For the remainder of the season, they leased cars from the railroads to move the revitalized "Welsh Bros. Golden Shows".[26]

Ehrich Weiss was hired by H. Richter's Sons in Manhattan in 1889. Two years later, inspired by the French conjurer Robert-Houdin, Weiss launched his magic career and began calling himself Houdini.

Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University

In June that same year, the Brothers Houdini appeared in a new vaudeville lineup at Vacca's East End Casino, the largest music hall on Coney Island.[27] This show's summer season opened on June 14,[28] conducted its Grand Opening festivities on June 28,[29] and closed early on July 9 due to poor business.[30] It may have been there while working at Vacca's that both brothers first met Brooklyn resident, Wilhelmina Beatrice "Bess" Rahner.[31] She was singing and dancing as one of the Floral Sisters in the same concert hall performance in which the Houdinis were presenting their magic act. Within days Harry and Bessie began a very brief courtship, and they eloped announcing their marriage as having taken place on June 22, 1994.[32] Years later, "Dash" Houdini confirmed that

this indeed was when Harry's courtship with Bess began.[33]

A newspaper clipping in the personal scrapbook kept by the Houdinis makes considerable note of an incident that occurred while the Houdini brothers and the Floral sisters were working on the same bill at Vacca's. After describing the Houdinis' "famous box trick," the article continued saying that when a man named Risey, who was employed at Vacca's, began…

> "…'shooting off his mouth,' Risey ran foul of one of the Hunyadi [sic] brothers who was taking one of the Floral sisters 'neat song and dance artists' for a stroll between 'turns.' He had heard of Risey's boast and glared at him. Risey passed the word about 'fakers and fake box tricks.' The Hunyadi [sic] heard the stinging words and turning quickly he shouted: 'In de presence of me ladyfren', I'll say notin', but I'll do youse dirt when I git back.' After hurling this defi he walked loftily away with his lady…Manager Vacca heard of the trouble and in a few hours he patched up a truce and then it was that Risey said he would go into the box and get out of it and expose the whole business."[34]

"Count" Vacca arranged for a challenge to take place on stage at an evening performance to provide proof of the legitimacy of the Houdinis' act. That night the Houdini brothers tied Risey and secured him in their trunk. After five full minutes, Risey could be faintly heard calling out for help. The Houdinis jumped into action. After opening the locks of the trunk, they pulled the man from the bag. He was weak and perspiring greatly.

Harry and Bessie started performing together soon after the Vacca show closed on July 9. Before the end of the month, it was reported that Houdini had bought out his brother's interest and that Bess had replaced Dash in the act.[35]

On New Year's Eve 1894, the Houdinis began a week-long engagement at Wonderland Musee Lecture Hall in Wilmington, Delaware.[36] They were booked again at Wonderland for an engagement that ended on April 16, 1895. The manager of that venue's winter vaudeville productions was Clinton Newton, and it was Newton who persuaded the Houdinis to enlist with the circus that he worked for during the spring and summer months.[37]

Earning celebrity in Pennsylvania

The recently wedded Houdinis joined Welsh Bros. in 1895 for the show's sixth annual tour. Many years later, George Welsh recalled that at that time the show traveled on six railroad cars which carried the equipment and some personnel.[38] He also recollected that the show already had

The Welsh Bros. Circus of 1894 featured two wrestling bears owned by the Carr brothers. The bears are seen in this photograph that was staged with the artists and staff of the annex. The banner at the right depicts a magician, but not Houdini. Harry and Bessie Houdini would present a mind reading act in the show's annex the following season.

Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society

an advertising car at the time. Even though the small circus was then moving by rail, the jumps to each new town were relatively short. Houdini remembered certain aspects of that first season:

> "In 1895 I was engaged by the Welsh Brothers' Circus, a circus which traveled almost exclusively through the State of Pennsylvania, and for the services of Mrs. Houdini and myself I received the sum of £4 weekly [about $20 at the time], railroad fares and board.
>
> "The amount was small, but I still look back with pleasure upon that season's work as being one in which we had an abundance of clothes to wear and good food to eat, for the Welsh Brothers certainly fed their artists extra well.
>
> "For this £4 weekly Mrs. Houdini and myself first of all had to give a free performance in front of the side show to attract the crowds. Inside, I then lectured upon the curiosities, gave a magic show, worked the Punch and Judy show, and with the assistance of Mrs. Houdini finally presented a second sight act. In the main concert Mrs. Houdini acted as a singing clown, while later on we presented our specialty, which consisted of the trunk trick in connection with the braid trick."[39]

It is likely that Houdini confused some of his and Mrs. Houdini's responsibilities that first season with those of their second tour three years later. In the Welsh Bros. annex (side show), they did indeed present an English mind reading "second sight" act, however, Professor Thorne did the magic and Punch & Judy presentations. Houdini was accurate in recollecting that his wife served as a comic vocalist, and that together they presented the Metamorphosis trunk in the big top.[40] Bessie's singing in the concert continued the use of the vocal talent she had displayed with the Floral Sisters the previous spring.

Welsh Bros. Circus opened on April 20, 1895 in its hometown of Lancaster with an extended multiple-day engagement. Following each performance in the big top, an "after show" was offered for an additional charge of five cents. From their very first concert performances, Harry and Bessie Houdini garnered substantial press coverage:

> "The best feature of the show is introduced in the concert. It is a cabinet trick done by the Houdinis. A large trunk is placed in the ring in front of the cabinet. Houdini's hands are securely tied behind him by a committee [of men from the audience], who have examined the box and declared it all right. Then, before beginning the principal trick, Houdini enters the cabinet, and returns in a moment without his coat, while his hands are still tied. The coat of a member of the committee is thrown into the cabinet with Houdini who appears a moment later wearing it. Then he is placed in a bag in the trunk. The bag is tied and the cord sealed. The trunk is locked and bound with rope. Then it is put into the cabinet. Mme. Houdini enters the cabinet, draws the curtain, and claps her hands thrice. Upon the third clap, Houdini rushes from the cabinet with his hands free and minus his coat. Immediately the trunk is pulled out of the cabinet. The ropes are still around it. When it is opened Mme. Houdini is found in the bag, the seal of which is unbroken, her hands are still tied behind her back and she wears the committeeman's coat."[41]

After the opening dates in Lancaster, the show went on the road. Bess Houdini had less than fond memories of the living quarters on the Welsh Bros. train:

> "Our lodging was a mere cupboard partitioned off in the car, with a flimsy curtain for a door. Within was just a cot, no chair, table or bureau. In fact, there was room only for a cot. A cardboard partition separated us from the next apartment, in which low voices rumbled…dismayed at the strange environment, the darkness, the cramped quarters, I fell on the cot sobbing."[42]

The show utilized two lots in York, Pennsylvania where it played May 6-11. There on May 10, the front page of the *York Daily* made special mention of the Houdini's performance in the concert which "surprised and puzzled the audience."[43]

Following several days in Harrisburg, two weeks in Lebanon, a week in Sunbury and shorter dates in a few other Pennsylvania towns, the Welsh circus and it new mystifying featured performers played a two-day stand in Pottsville beginning on June 14. A slightly different description of the Houdini act appeared on the front page of the Pottsville newspaper:

> "The concert after the main show is over is well worth the nickel one is required to pay to see it…the great illusive trick of the Houdini box mystery. A large trunk containing heavy padlocks is placed in front of a cabinet or curtained room. First Houdini asks a committee of three persons in the audience to tie his hands behind his back. When this is done, he steps into the cabinet and instantly returns with his coat off and his hands still tied. Then he borrows a coat from one of the committee of three and again he conceals himself in the cabinet. In the twinkle of an eye, he comes out and the coat he borrowed is on his back while his hands are still firmly bound. But the greatest of all his feats occurs when he is placed in a bag, the opening drawn together with a cord, the knot sealed with wax and then man and bag are packed in the trunk. The lid is locked, heavy ropes are placed around the trunk by the committee

When the curtains of their pipe-framed cabinet were closed, the Houdinis exchanged places in "the blink of an eye." They were photographed with their Metamorphosis trunk a short time before joining the Welsh Bros. Circus. Note the embroidery on the valance of the curtained cabinet. New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Houdini Collection

and everything is made secure to prevent the man from getting out of his narrow quarters. The trunk is placed in the cabinet and a petite female in tights steps behind the curtain. She claps her hands three times, and lo, there appeareth the man whom we had last seen stowed away in the trunk. He is coatless, his hands are free, but where is the woman? She has disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. The trunk is still locked and bound with ropes. The curtain is drawn to conceal the trunk and in an instant she appears before the audience with the borrowed coat on. It is all done so quickly that one can hardly believe his eyes or senses. As an illusionary trick it is unquestionably equal to any ever performed by the Wizard Kellar."[44]

Newspaper coverage in many towns on the tour made mention of other performers who were part of the Welsh Bros. ensemble of 1895 along with the Houdinis. These included George and Lillian Delsabos, trapeze artists advertised as from France; a Mexican juggler named Scofield; veteran Barnum & Bailey clown Charles O'Brien; a 17-year-old boy named Claudie May who presented "trick dogs;" Whitlark and Kaminski, the frog men (contortionists); and Frank and Ida McCormick with their "gun drill."[45] Other performers who trouped for at least part of the season included the Venelli Bros. on horizontal bars, Mons. Monsulla and Russell with their double Spanish web specialty and flying rings, and clowns Joseph Kearney and Billy Ashton.[46] Miss Russell also accomplished "a slide for life" free act on the midway, "the most daring feat ever done by any lady" according to at

least one account.[47]

In late June, Major George Hussey, a ventriloquist and lecturer, joined Welsh Bros. With heavy attendance at the concerts reported in many towns, Hussey was added to bolster the post-performance concert lineup.[48]

The circus stayed in Pennsylvania for the remainder of June and the entire month of July. This part of the route included week-long stands in Shamokin (June 24-30) and Williamsport (July 1-7), both cities in the central part of the state.

August began with three days in Carlisle, Pennsylvania where the local papers made considerable mention of the Houdinis' "Metamorphosis" box mystery. One newspaper noted "Their work of exchanging places after a committee of 5 have securely fastened the professor, tying his hands, then tying him up in a bag and then into a large iron bound box, is something incomprehensible..."[49] On the same day, another newspaper proclaimed, "The Houdinis in their wonderful cabinet trick done, with startling rapidity, continues to mystify the public."[50] Yet another report from Carlisle observed that the Houdinis' act was presented during "a concert or after-performance."[51] This further confirms that the Metamorphosis act was always a feature of the concert throughout the entirety of the 1895 season.

Ringmaster Clinton Newton is surrounded by the male members of the 1895 Welsh Bros. performing cast including Harry Houdini at the right. There were at least four female performers in the troupe who are not pictured. These included Lillian Delsabos, Ida McCormick, Miss Russell and Bessie Houdini. Courtesy of Potter & Potter, Inc.

Often, descriptions of the Welsh performers and acts were provided to newspapers along the route by Welsh Bros. press agent, Clinton Newton. Newton, who had been with the circus since its beginning in 1890, also served as the principal side show lecturer and manager,[52] the performance manager and the person who introduced each act during performances:

> "Clinton M. Newton, descriptive orator, is nearly half the show. He entertains his audience most agreeably by his graphic announcements, his courtly manner and the comprehensive swing of his leg as he completes his work and turns to await the arrival of the performers he has announced."[53]

Welsh Bros. Circus played the last of its 1895 week-long dates in Altoona beginning on August 19. The first three weeks of September (through Sept. 21) were filled with one-day stands moving west in central Pennsylvania, and then two and three-day stands returning back eastward. The official closing date was in Northumberland on September 21, but after the "home run" journey to Lancaster two performances were given there with all proceeds benefiting the local "Soup Fund."

Interval from the circus

During 1896 and 1897, Welsh Bros. continued to establish its high-quality and virtuous reputation as a small rail show in Pennsylvania and neighboring states. It did so, however, without the Houdinis who pursued other endeavors. After they left the circus, they joined the American Gaiety Girls and invested a half interest in the faltering burlesque show with monies saved during the Welsh tour.[54] During November 1895, a performance at Gorman's Theater was reviewed by *The Manchester Union*. The newspaper pronounced that, "The specialties were good, the principal feature being the 'Metamorphosis,' a clever thing introduced by Harry and Bessie Houdini."[55] The article also noted that Houdini would be working "with handcuffs borrowed from the audience, which he will use in doing the 'Metamorphosis.'" This substantiates that the Houdinis, at least occasionally, used handcuffs when presenting their substitution trunk act as opposed to having their hands tied with rope.

After American Gaiety Girls folded in April 1896, the Houdinis toured parts of Nova Scotia with the Marco Magic Company[56] and played vaudeville shows, dime museums, concert halls and a host of other indoor venues. They also collaborated to improve their "second sight" mind-reading act, and Harry worked to perfect his escapes from handcuffs

THE MASTER MONARCHS OF MODERN MYSTERIES.
THE
HOUDINI'S
Original Introducers of
"Metamorphosis."
(A Person Exchanged in 3 Seconds.)
Executed in full glare of the light, and is without a single doubt the Greatest Mystery of the present times.
MYSTERIOUS HARRY.
LA PETITE BESSIE.
IMPORTANT INFORMATION.—Any and ALL ACTS similar or like this, on the rapid exchange order, ARE COPIES and IMITATIONS OF THIS ACT, as this is POSITIVELY the Original and Only Metamorphosis.
WE HAVE SPECIAL LITHO CUTS. ETC.
You can book an act inferior but not superior in our specialty.
189

During the mid-1890s, the Houdinis used this horizontally formatted letter paper for their correspondence with managers of theatres and other venues seeking bookings, as well as coordinating details regarding their appearances. The faint handwritten message at the bottom of this piece is signed Harry Houdini. Library of Congress

and jail cells.

Between 1894 (when the Welsh brothers bought back their title and equipment) and 1896, the name of their circus varied back and forth between Welsh Bros. Golden Shows and Welsh Bros. All-United Shows. For the 1897 season, a new title was activated usually appearing as Welsh Bros. Newest Great Shows. Clinton Newton continued as the entertainment company's press agent and its performance manager, recruiting the artists and introducing the acts during the tours.

The 1898 encore

During the winter when he was not traveling with the circus, Newton worked as the press agent and assistant manager of W. L. Dockstader's Wonderland Theatre in Wilmington, Delaware.[57] He had been employed in this position all but one winter since 1893 and was again at Dockstader's when sometime between October 1897 and early February 1898 he wrote to Harry Houdini offering another season with the Welsh show.[58] In the letter, Newton asked Houdini to let him know if he could accept the offer.

On February 21, 1898, Harry and Bessie Houdini affixed their signatures to a contract to return to Welsh Bros. for the 35-week "summer season" that was to commence on April 16. The agreement set forth that the Houdinis would again present "their box mystery 'Metamorphosis' and Miss Houdini's sterio-comic [sic] specialty and work in side-show if necessary." A hand-written note in the side margin on the back of the contract specified that all male members of the cast were required to appear in the daily street parade. For these acts and services, Harry and Bess were to be paid $25 per week with board, lodging and transportation provided by the show. At the discretion of the management, lodging could be on the train or in hotels.[59]

In early April, only days before the Houdinis were to report to the circus in Lancaster, they were performing in Buf-

falo, New York. Among the "attractions offered at Wonderland [different than the Wonderland in Wilmington] this week…Houdini's mysterious box trick is astonishing everyone, and on Friday he extends an invitation to the police to bring any handcuffs or manacles from which he cannot escape."[60]

Meanwhile, final preparations for the new season were underway at the Welsh Bros. winter quarters. *The Semi-Weekly New Era* reported on April 9 that all of the show's tents were new and would be erected for the first time, the same being the case for the new seating and the "big calcium lights."[61] Three days later, another Lancaster newspaper observed that "The new and magnificent tents of Welsh Bros.' Shows [set up the preceding day]…present a very beautiful appearance, which is greatly enhanced by several large American and Cuban flags fluttering from the big centre poles."[62] It had been less than two months since the U.S.S. Maine had mysteriously exploded in Havana Harbor killing more than 260 sailors, and the Cuban flags were likely placed in support of the overwhelming sentiment throughout much of the country favoring the Cuban people in their struggle for independence from Spain's colonial rule.[63]

The weather on opening day was ideal for circus going, and large crowds turned out for the inaugural performances. Once again, the Houdinis impressed patrons:

> "The circus season in Lancaster was opened on Saturday afternoon at Rockland and Locust streets by Welsh Brothers shows… The most brilliant feature of all is the mystical act called 'Metamorphosis,' which is presented by Harry and Beatrice Houdini. They are one of the big hits of the performance."[64]

National Pr. & Eng. Co. of Chicago produced two half-sheet lithographs advertising the Houdinis' appearances with Welsh Bros. Newest Great Shows in 1898. The Metamorphosis and King of Cards posters were also printed for Houdini's personal use without the Welsh title. The "King of Cards" poster was reproduced on the cover of Genii *in 1941.*

Bob Kentner Collection

The opening night show had a turn-away crowd.[65] Although the circus was still a one-ring "ten cent show," it is not known if the performance tent was in fact larger than in previous years as reported in the local papers. After a week at the Rockland and Locust lot, Welsh Bros. set up in two additional locations in Lancaster, appearing in the city through April 28.

During the first week in Lancaster, Harry Houdini helped garner publicity for the Welsh Bros. show with an escape performed at the local police station:

> "Mr. Houdini, who is connected with Welsh Bros.' show, gave a clever exhibition of his skill as a sleight-of-hand performer at the station house, on Tuesday. Several of the police officers using their own cuffs and shackles cuffed his hands together with two pairs of cuffs, shackled his feet, and then bound all three together. The officers kept possession of the keys. Houdini went into a separate room and emerged in a couple of minutes free of all the articles which were used to bind him."[66]

This gratuitous newspaper coverage and word of mouth of Houdini's escape helped attract large attendance throughout the 13-day opening run in the Welsh brothers' hometown.

Clinton Newton wrote to *The New York Clipper* reporting on the Welsh Bros. opening stand. He listed the performers as: Amy and Harry La Van, trapeze; Charles Levine and Alma Booth, contortionists and equilibrists; Charles

This 1898 picture of Welsh Bros. performers has often been misdated as 1895 or 1896. None of those in the image were part of the cast during those earlier years except for ringmaster Clinton Newton (seated second from the left) and the Houdinis (seated at the right). Co-owner Michael Welsh, wearing the Stetson hat, is near the center of the front row.

New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Houdini Collection

Weitzel; James C. Bard; George B. Lowrey and John D. Jenkins, talking and pantomime clowns; Jessie Vellier, gymnast; Leon Mason, knock-about clown; Charles Bard; Eddie Kolb, high pedestal artist; Miss Mack; and Prof. J. E. Burtine, liberty ponies and English leaping greyhounds. Newton also related that Prof. Jules Reybold was in charge of the eleven-piece band; and that "Weitzel, Bard and La Van" worked together in a featured triple bar act. Newton's highest praise was assigned to the Houdinis, his commentary noting, "In the concert an unusually strong bill of vaudeville features is introduced with Harry and Beatrice Houdini and their mystical exhibit of 'Metamorphosis' as the star attraction, and they are very heavily featured."[67]

A few newspaper accounts of the 1898 performance also listed Akimoto's Japanese jugglers, Mlle. Zanta with her pole act, aerialist Pearl Forepaugh on her flying rings, and the aerial work of the Forepaugh sisters. Apparently, these performers appeared in the Welsh Bros. program sometime after the opening stand.

Following the Lancaster opening, the circus circled through east central Pennsylvania with extended dates in Lebanon, Harrisburg, Reading, Allentown, and Pottsville – all interspersed among numerous one and two-day stands. A review of the Welsh performance in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania on June 6 confirmed that the Houdinis were indeed the closing number of the concert:

> "The concert given after the circus is no less pleasing than the first part. It is a clean, wholesome pot pourri of amusement and the closing number, the cabinet trick given by the Houdinis is startling in its mystification. The act is original with the Houdinis and one of the features of the show."[68]

No performances were given on Sundays during the season, such being the case when the Welsh train traveled to Norristown on July 3. The tiny town was a mere 15 miles from the heart of neighboring Philadelphia. It was a three-day stand with performances commencing on Monday the Fourth of July. The Norristown engagement proved to be the most miserable endured during 1898 for everyone with the circus, including the Houdinis. On Sunday, the official temperature in southeast Pennsylvania had reached 100 degrees, and on the paved streets of Philadelphia thermometers registered as high as 105 degrees.[69] July 4 was not much better as the temperature topped out at 99 degrees.[70] It was simply too stifling – even at night – to be enclosed on the train or in a hotel room. In Harry Houdini's travel diary, he wrote next to the Norristown dates, "Rottenest bus of Season. Fearfully

hot. I slept on side walks of main Street."[71]

On July 30, the show moved north into New York for the first booking of the year outside of the Keystone State. From Binghamton, the route turned to the west along the southern New York border, crossing back into Pennsylvania on August 14 for a date at Bradford. Three-day stands in Altoona and York were followed by shorter dates in Maryland and West Virginia.

Among the dates in Maryland was a one-day stand in Frederick on September 14 where the evening newspaper reported on the presence in the city of the circus and its morning parade: "The novel street parade at noontime, attracted much attention and the music of the big military band was accorded much praise."[72] Many years later during an interview in the city, Harry Houdini recalled that morning street march: " 'I was in Frederick about 30 years ago.' Houdini said, 'when I was with the Welsh circus which is now out of existence. I remember while walking in the parade, going past the house where Barbara Frietchie [had] waved her flag. All the boys took off their hats.' "[73] Barbara Frietchie (1766-1862) had been memorialized by John Greenleaf Whittier's beloved Civil War era poem which chronicled a 90-year-old woman's impassioned plea (attributed to Frietchie) to occupying Confederate soldiers under the command of General Stonewall Jackson:

" 'Shoot if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country's flag,' she said."

The 1898 season concluded with eleven one-day stands in far western Pennsylvania. On October 8, Houdini wrote in his diary, "Welsh Brothers closed. Home sweet home. Last two weeks seemed like eternity."[74] Back in Lancaster, two performances were given on October 10 – once again given for the benefit of the local "Soup Fund." Thus ended the American circus career of Harry Houdini and his young wife.

On the final day of the 1898 season, "Welsh Bros." provided Harry and Beatrice Houdini with a handwritten letter of recommendation inscribed under a Welsh Bros. letterhead. The author of the letter (perhaps Mike Welsh or Clinton Newton) obviously thought highly of the Houdinis:

"To Whom it may Concern

"We can cheerfully recommend Harry and Beatrice Houdini with their unique and mysterious act called 'Metamorphosis' as being the strongest drawing card of its class in America, their act is totally unlike others and always creates a profound impression upon their auditors. They were the especially engaged feature of our concert during the tenting season of 1895 and also the past season (1898) for a period of twenty five weeks. They are artists of the front line and furthermore a lady and gentleman in all that the term implies and can always find room with any of our amusement enterprises.

Welsh Bros. played exclusively in Pennsylvania for the first 15 weeks of 1898. Houdini noted in his travel diary that the Fourth of July date in Norristown – identified on this route card – was "fearfully hot" and that at night he, and presumedly Bessie, slept on the sidewalk of Main Street.

Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society

"We will be pleased to play them at any time. The Houdinis are truly great people.

"Yours very truly
Welsh Bros
Mgrs & Propr's Welsh Bros. Shows
"Lancaster, Penna
Monday Oct 8th 1898"
[Monday was actually Oct. 10][75]

Two days after the tour ended, Charles E. Griffin of Suffern, New York wrote a letter to Houdini explaining why he had not sent 200 illustrated catalogues ordered for resale by Houdini.[76] Griffin noted that he had been away from home and had not immediately seen Houdini's letter. Griffin thought the delay would mean that the merchandise would not be received until after the circus season was over. This suggests that Houdini had been previously supplied with

The Welsh show continued to grow after the Houdinis made their final tour in 1898. In February of 1900, The New York Clipper *reported that during the new season the circus would use a 100-foot round top with two 50-foot middle sections. That tent may have been a replacement for Hunting's three-pole big top that was acquired toward the end of the 1898 season. The big top with what appears to be fresh white canvas can be seen in this photo taken in Lancaster c. 1900.*

Private collection of Fred D. Pfening III

pitchbooks and had an additional source of income on the Welsh show – perhaps from sales he and Bess conducted after each concert performance.

Welsh continues to grow

Sometime toward the end of the 1898 season the Welsh brothers purchased Hunting's Circus: "The Welsh Bros. now own two circuses, having recently purchased the Bob Hunting concern. The season of the latter circus was closed last Saturday [September 24]."[77] Hunting's Circus was a railroad show that maintained its winter quarters in New Castle, Pennsylvania. Robert J. Hunting had been the sole proprietor since the circus opened in 1888.

The apparent reason for the sale of Hunting's Circus by Bob Hunting's wife and son was that Hunting had been arrested in Canandaigua, New York for shooting and wounding the show's bandleader, Thomas F. Leddy. Hunting was unable to pay his employees on Sunday July 24, and the bandleader protested. A fight broke out, and when Leddy assaulted Hunting with a metal music rack, the veteran showman fired his revolver striking Leddy in the abdomen.[78]

Back in 1895, the size of Hunting's main canvas had grown to 120′ x 180′ with three center poles – considerably larger than the Welsh performance tent that year.[79] During the last weeks of the 1898 season, the larger Hunting's circus was operated as a second unit bearing the Welsh name. Some of the Hunting equipment and staff were subsequently folded into the main Welsh show for the following season.

By 1901, John and Michael Welsh owned and operated five different traveling shows. In addition to their railroad circus, they toured a minstrel show, an Uncle Tom's Cabin show, a stage production titled *Ten Nights* and an "Afro-American Show" called *The Black Age.*[80]

The Billboard ran a lengthy review of the Welsh circus in September 1902 setting forth the roles each of the brothers were handling with the show that year. There had been no change since the inaugural season of 1890. John Welsh served as the Advance Agent, Michael Welsh was General Manager and George Welsh was Treasurer.[81] The show's 150-foot round top tent with 54-foot middle sections accommodated one ring and two stages – a substantially larger canvas arena than in prior seasons.

John and Michael sold out to Sig Sautelle in early 1905, but stayed on with the new Sig Sautelle-Welsh Bros. Circus. John was employed as the show's general agent and Michael

ran the cookhouse.[82] Thereafter, the two Welsh brothers operated circuses both separately – sometimes with other partners – and from 1909 through 1915, together again as equal owners. Welsh Bros. Newest Great Shows completed its final tour in 1915.

Epilogue

John Welsh had married circus strongwoman Madame Yucca (1864-1917) in 1904. He retired from showbusiness after the 1915 season and moved with his wife to Philadelphia where he owned an apartment house for more than two decades. He died July 5, 1941 at the age of 80.[83]

Michael Welsh and his wife, circus aerialist Nelly Valenteen, also moved to Philadelphia where he worked in "moving picture" theaters and other amusement ventures. He died April 5, 1945 at the age of 79.[84]

George Welsh worked as a house painter in New Holland (Lancaster County), Pennsylvania after he retired from circus endeavors. In 1952, he fell at his home and fractured a bone in his neck, spending three months in the hospital. He made a miraculous recovery and later remarked, "It is pretty hard to kill an old circus horse."[85] He died August 6, 1957 at the age of 88.[86]

After Clinton Newton's circus career, he fell into poor health. He worked for a period of time as a night clerk at a hotel in Philadelphial[87] and died penniless on or about April 3, 1930.[88]

In contrast to his old friend Newton, Harry Houdini prospered immensely after leaving Welsh Bros., earning a considerable fortune as the greatest escape artist the world had ever seen.

A year before his death in 1926, Houdini wrote to a fellow magician, Linden Heverly, who had contacted him reflecting on having seen the trunk illusion on Welsh Bros. many years before. Houdini's typed response read as follows:

"September 21, 1925

"My dear Heverly:

"That memory picture that you write about at the Welsh Brothers Circus is correct. I was the magician that had the gas pipe cabinet curtained floor that had the black box, and I did the back and front in the concert.

Michael Welsh was the general manager of the circus and the brother who was responsible for day-to-day operations. The reverse side of this calling card listed the five different shows the Welsh brothers operated by 1901. Tom Boldt Collection

"I was with Welsh Brothers Circus two years, I believe it was in 1894 or 5 and 1897 or 8, and the lady that worked with me is still the same little charming wife that I had, having been wedded to the present Mrs. Houdini for over thirty years.

"I got quite a kick out of your letter, to think you could remember all the way back. We did not get very much money but we certainly were very happy.

"I am doing the self same trunk trick in my new show and am using a trunk which is twenty eight years old, and it was my first investment, the first I ever made in magic.

"Must be brief, just got in town.

"Kindest regards and best wishes,

"Sincerely yours,

"Houdini"

[handwritten signature][89]

Houdini obviously looked back with fondness to the Welsh Bros. seasons when he and the petite Bessie had traveled with the circus.

Following Houdini's death, Beatrice opened a tea house in New York, later moving to Hollywood, California. She participated in annual séances to see if Harry could make good on his assurance that he would return from the dead if it were possible to do so. She gave up on this effort after the séance on Halloween 1936 – the tenth anniversary of Houdini's death. She died of a heart attack on February 11, 1943 at the age of 67.

Performing on the Welsh Bros. Circus and elsewhere, Harry and Bess had called their trunk transformation "Metamorphosis" wherein they exchanged places in three seconds' time. A considerably more monumental transformation took place over the years that followed as Harry Houdini's fame spread and he became an international sensation. Even more notable than the supreme celebrity he achieved in his lifetime, is the fact that his renown lives on, as David Copperfield has recently put it, as "the most famous escapologist of all time."[90] **Bw**

Acknowledgements

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On July 7, 1912 in New York City, Houdini was handcuffed, chained and nailed inside a packing crate that was weighted down and lowered into the East River. He reappeared on the surface of the murky water about two and half minutes later. Such spectacular escapes led to lasting international fame.

Library of Congress

research inquiries and/or providing images, acknowledgement is also accorded to Dr. Bruce J. Averbook; Chris Berry; Mike Caveney; John Cox; Fred Dahlinger Jr.; Roger Dreyer; Gabe Fajuri and Potter & Potter, Inc.; Bob Kentner; Fred Pfening III; Ken Trombly; and Pete Shrake, Archivist, Circus World Museum/Wisconsin Historical Society.

Endnotes

1. Harry Houdini was born on March 24, 1874 and died on October 31, 1926.
2. *The Appleton Crescent,* Appleton, Wis., July 23, 1904, p. 5.
3. Will Goldston, editor, *The Magician Annual 1909-1910,* "Harry Houdini" by Harry Houdini (London: A. W. Gamage, LTD, 1910). Jack Hoeffler was born in Appleton about 1873 and was only slightly older than Houdini. He claimed to have toured with the W. C. Coup Circus as a drummer at a young age; he managed the Appleton Theatre 1901-1903; he operated other theaters in Wisconsin, Indiana, Minnesota and Illinois; and he eventually settled in Quincy, Illinois.
4. *Appleton Post Crescent,* Appleton, Wis., Sept. 29, 1915, p. 3, picked up from the St. Paul Dispatch wire story.
5. Houdini had six siblings; two brothers and a sister were born in the United States.
6. 1880 United States Federal Census, Appleton, Wis., entry for Samuel M. Weiss (minister).
7. 1878 City of Appleton (Wis.) map; Snyder, Van Vechten & Co., copyright 1877.
8. *The New York Clipper,* June 28, 1890, p. 243. The association of the name Dock's in the title was not used consistently during the first season of the Welsh circus.
9. James W. Shettel, "They Bought a Circus," *The White Tops,* Jan.-Feb. 1946, p. 3. The information conveyed in Shettel's article was primarily based on interviews with George Welsh who was 77 years old when the meetings with the author took place. The exact year of the Welsh parents' immigration is unknown.
10. Ibid., p. 3.
11. The flood that took the lives of more than 2,200 people occurred on May 31, 1889 when the South Fork Dam failed just upstream of Johnstown, New York.
12. Shettel, op. cit., p. 3. Robert L. Parkinson's *Directory of American Circuses* indicates that Lowande's Brazilian Circus still operated for some period of time in 1890.
13. *The New York Clipper,* Aug. 31, 1889, p. 409.
14. Shettel, op. cit., p. 4., and *The New Era-Lancaster,* Lancaster, Pa., Mar. 1, 1890, p. 1.
15. *The New Era-Lancaster,* Lancaster, Pa., Apr. 30, 1890, p. 4.
16. M. Luther Heisey, *Along the Streets of Old Lancaster* (Lancaster, Pa.: Lancaster County Historical Society, 1957).
17. Shettel, op. cit., p. 3.
18. *The New York Clipper,* May 3, 1890, p. 118.
19. Shettel, op. cit., p. 4.
20. Draper file index, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society.
21. *The New York Clipper,* June 25, 1892, p. 244.
22. H. Richter's Sons manufactured men's neckwear at its building on Broadway. Ehrich Weiss was hired there in 1889 as an assistant lining cutter.
23. *The New York Clipper,* June 10, 1893, p. 214.
24. *The Weekly New Era,* Lancaster, Pa., Apr. 14, 1894, p. 1.
25. *Harrisburg Telegraph,* Harrisburg, Pa., May 21, 1894, p. 4.
26. Shettel, op. cit., p. 4.
27. *The Brooklyn Citizen,* Brooklyn, N.Y., June 25, 1894, p. 7.
28. *The Brooklyn Citizen,* Brooklyn, N.Y., June 15, 1894, p. 7.
29. *The Brooklyn Citizen,* Brooklyn, N.Y., June 28, 1894, p. 7.
30. *The Standard Union,* Brooklyn, N.Y., July 9, 1894, p. 5.
31. Beatrice Rahner Houdini was born on January 23, 1876 and died on February 11, 1943.
32. Harold Kellock, *Houdini: His Life Story from the Recollections and Documents of Beatrice Houdini* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1928). On pp. 43-47 Kellock relates a rather implausible story attributed to Bess Houdini about first seeing Houdini at a high school production where he was performing, going with him to Coney Island only days thereafter, and getting married on June 22.
33. William Lindsey Gresham, *Houdini The Man Who Walked Through Walls* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1975), p. 26.
34. Personal scrapbook of Harry and Beatrice Houdini, clipping titled "Risey in the Box," *The Brooklyn Citizen,* June 22, 1894, p. 4.1, scan provided by Richard W. Flint. The original 1894-1899 scrapbook was donated to and was conserved while at the Outagamie Museum in Appleton, Wisconsin, presently named the History Museum at the Castle. It was previously in the private collection of Sidney Radner. Its current location is unknown. A copy of this article can be found in online versions of *The Brooklyn Citizen,* June 22, 1894, p. 3.
35. Ibid., clipping from *The Coney Island Clipper* (Brooklyn, N.Y.), July 28, 1894.
36. *The New York Clipper,* Jan. 5, 1895, p. 706.
37. *The New York Clipper,* Apr. 13, 1895, p. 84.
38. Shettel, op. cit., p. 4. Welsh's memory that this was in 1896 was likely confused because he also said Houdini was there at the time, and the

Houdinis were not on the show in 1896 or 1897.
39. Goldston, editor, *The Magician Annual 1909-1910,* op. cit.
40. *The New York Clipper,* May 4, 1895, p. 131.
41. *York Daily,* York, Pa., May 4, 1895, p. 1 (from the *Lancaster Examiner*).
42. Kellock, op. cit., p. 75.
43. *York Daily,* York, Pa., May 10, 1895, p. 1.
44. *Daily Miners' Journal,* Pottsville, Pa., June 14, 1895, p. 1.
45. *The Daily Gazette and Bulletin,* Williamsport, Pa., July 1, 1895, p. 5.
46. *The New York Clipper,* May 4, 1895, op. cit.
47. *York Daily,* York, Pa., Apr. 24, 1895, p. 1.
48. *Evening Sentinel,* Carlisle, Pa., Aug. 3, 1895, p. 3.
49. *The Sentinel,* Carlisle, Pa., Aug. 3, 1895, p. 3.
50. *Carlisle Evening Herald,* Carlisle, Pa., Aug. 3, 1895, p. 4.
51. *Altoona Tribune,* Altoona, Pa., Aug. 13, 1895, p. 5 (from the *Daily Leader,* Carlisle, Pa.).
52 *The New York Clipper,* Dec. 8, 1894, p. 639.
53. *Tyrone Daily Herald,* Tyrone, Pa., Aug. 10, 1895, p. 4.
54. Kellock, op. cit., p. 83.
55. "A Wonderful Trick," *The Manchester Union,* Nov. 8, 1895 newspaper clipping, p. 4.2 of the personal scrapbook of Harry and Beatrice Houdini 1894-1899, op. cit.
56. For a detailed account of the Marco Magic Company tour of Canada in the summer of 1896, see Bruce MacNab, *The Metamorphosis: The Apprenticeship of Harry Houdini* (Fredericton, New Brunswick: Goose Lane Editions, 2012).
57. *The Sun,* Wilmington, Del., Dec. 26, 1898, p. 1.
58. Letter from C. M. Newton to Harry Houdini, concluding page, Tom Boldt Collection. The date of the letter is uncertain because the first page(s) are missing. The years for which Newton worked at the Wonderland Theatre are confirmed by his c.1898 business card which is also in the Tom Boldt Collection.
59. Photo copy of original 1898 contract between Welsh Bros. and the Houdinis provided by Tom Boldt to Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society. The original document was included in the Sidney Radner collection that was previously leased to and on exhibit at the Outagamie Museum, now known as the History Museum at the Castle in Appleton, Wisconsin.
60. *The Buffalo Enquirer,* Buffalo, N.Y., Apr. 7, 1898, p. 5.
61. *The Semi-Weekly New Era,* Lancaster, Pa., Apr. 9, 1898, p. 5.
62. *The New Era,* Lancaster, Pa., Apr. 12, 1898, p. 2.
63. In January 1898, the *U.S.S. Maine* was sent to Havana to help protect American interests in the city. On February 15, the battleship was destroyed in Havana Harbor by a mysterious explosion that killed a reported 268 crewmembers. The incident led to the rallying cry, "Remember the Maine," and on April 21 Congress granted President McKinley the authority to use military forces to "liberate" Cuba from Spain.
64. *The Lancaster Morning News,* Lancaster, Pa., Apr. 18, 1898, p. 2.
65. *The New Era,* Lancaster, Pa., Apr. 18, 1898, p. 2.
66. Personal scrapbook of Harry and Beatrice Houdini, op. cit., p. 13.1, clipping titled "Clever Sleight-of-Hand Trick," *The New Era,* Lancaster, PA., Apr. 20, 1898, p. 1.
67. *The New York Clipper,* Apr. 30, 1898, p. 145.
68. *The Evening Herald,* Shenandoah, Pa., June 7, 1898, p. 4.
69. *Philadelphia Inquirer,* Philadelphia, Pa., July 4, 1898, p. 5.
70. *The Philadelphia Times,* Philadelphia, Pa., July 5, 1898, p. 4.
71. Harry Houdini's personal travel diary, 1897-1899; Dr. Bruce J. Averbook Collection, Cleveland, Ohio; memoranda for July 4-6, 1898.
72. *The News,* Frederick, Md., Sept. 14, 1898, p. 3.
73. *Frederick News,* Frederick, Md., Nov. 25, 1924, p. 1.
74. Kellock, op. cit., p. 112.
75. The original letter is in the Roger Dreyer Collection.
76. Letter from Chas. E. Griffin to Harry Houdini dated Oct. 12, 1898, Tom Boldt Collection.
77. *The Lancaster Morning News,* Lancaster, Pa., Sept. 27, 1898. p. 4.
78. *The New Castle News,* New Castle, Pa., July 27, 1898.
79. Robert Hunting's Circus Route Book, 1895, p. 17, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society.
80. M. H. Welsh calling card, 1901-1902, Tom Boldt Collection.
81. *The Billboard,* Sept. 6, 1902, p. 5.
82. Shettel, op. cit., p. 5.
83. "John T. Welsh, Circus Pioneer Dies in Phila.," *Intelligencer Journal,* Lancaster, Pa., July 7, 1941, p. 2.
84. "M. H. Welsh Dies; Circus Pioneer," *Lancaster New Era,* Lancaster, Pa., April 7, 1945, p. 3.
85. "County's Oldest Ex-Showman Stretches Run to 86 Years," *Intelligencer Journal,* Lancaster, Pa., Feb. 28, 1955, p. 1.
86. "George Welsh Dies at Age 88, Member of Area Circus Family," *Intelligencer Journal,* Lancaster, Pa., Aug. 7, 1957, p. 2.
87. E. E. Meredith, "Dear Hobby-Bandwagon," *Hobby Bandwagon,* Sept. 1947, p. 3 and 7.
88. "Seeks Brother Here," *Lancaster New Era,* Lancaster, Pa., Apr. 3, 1930, p. 30.
89. Photo copy of Harry Houdini letter to Linden Heverly, Sept. 21, 1925, Fred Dahlinger, Jr. Collection. The location of the original is unknown.
90. David Copperfield, Richard Wiseman and David Britland, *David Copperfield's History of Magic* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), p. 113.

Welsh Bros. opened the 1910 season in Columbia, Pennsylvania, a short distance from the circus winter quarters in Lancaster. By this time, Houdini had already become the most recognizable escape artist in the world. Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society

The pristine canvas of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey appears in sharp contrast to a gritty Philadelphia neighborhood of coal and lumber yards at the start of the 1926 tented season.

Chris Berry Collection

Be a Circus Here
Philadelphia Story
by Chris Berry

Clyde Beatty and his old friend were deep in conversation when there was a knock at the door of his trailer. Only a few hours earlier the 1963 edition of the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus had rolled onto the North Philadelphia showgrounds and the lot was buzzing with activity. As he opened the door of the Airstream, Beatty was greeted by a group of youngsters between the ages of ten and twelve. The boys quickly explained that they had come to Lighthouse Field with the hope of working for a free ticket, but others had already been given the job and they did not have any money.

Beatty thought for a moment, then coached them on the best way to sneak into the big top, and even suggested where they would have the best chance of ducking in.

"Suppose we get thrown out…?"

"If you do, come back and we'll try to figure out something else," he responded.

During the performance that afternoon the youngsters spotted the animal trainer's friend in the big top. One of them said, "It worked! Will you please thank Mr. Beatty for us?"

When the show ended Ed Anthony relayed the message to Beatty and asked why he did it. Beatty explained that even though he wanted the boys to see the circus, "If I had arranged to get them free tickets, half the kids in Philadelphia would be rapping on my door tomorrow asking for the same thing. News travels fast over the children's grapevine."[1]

Special tokens were created shortly after John Bill Ricketts presented America's first circus performance in Philadelphia.

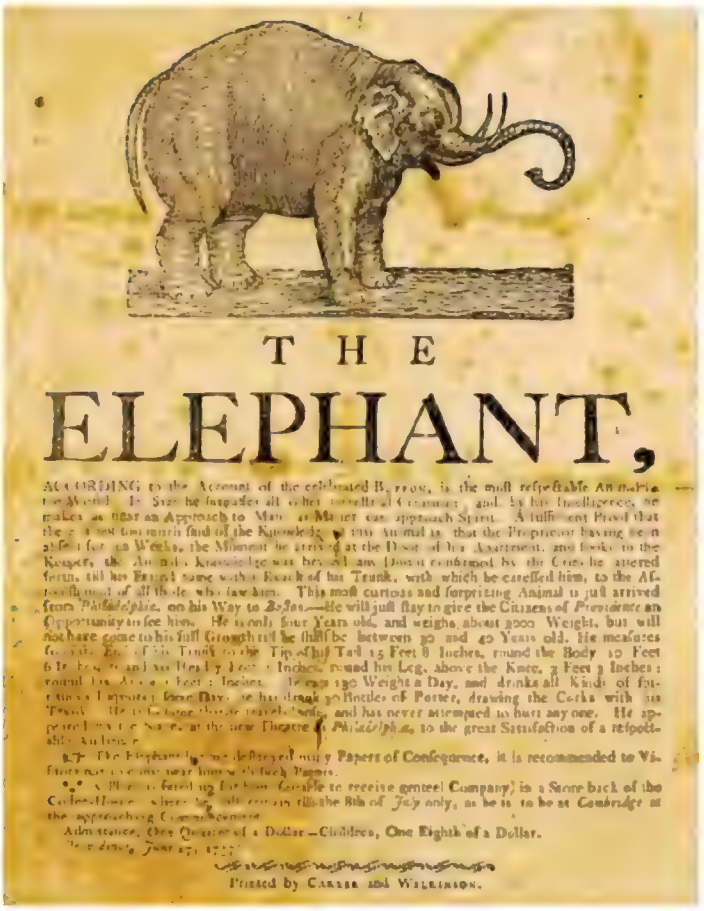
American Numismatic Society

News has traveled fast in Philadelphia since William Penn founded the city in 1682, and when an equestrian named John Bill Ricketts arrived from England in 1792 his riding academy quickly became the talk of the town. Ricketts had learned to ride at the Hughes Royal Circus in London, and in 1793 some of those he worked with in England joined him and began rehearsing in an open-air arena that could accommodate about 800 people.

The American circus was born on April 3, 1793, at the corner of 12th and Market streets in Philadelphia. The audience that day applauded Ricketts on horseback along with a tightrope dancer named Spinacuta and a clown and tumbler named McDonald.[2]

In the decade following the American Revolution, Philadelphia served as capital of the new republic, and less than three weeks after the first performance President George Washington made the first of several appearances at the arena. His vice president, John Adams, also attended the show.[3]

Although Ricketts presented the only circus performance in the United States, small menageries were already traveling the countryside, and on July 30, 1796, the first elephant exhibited in North America made an appearance in Philadelphia. The so-called "Crowninshield" elephant, named after the captain of the ship that brought him to the New World, appeared on High Street between 10th and 11th.



THE

ELEPHANT,

ACCORDING to the Account of the celebrated Buffon, is the most respectable Animal in the World. In Size he surpasses all other terrestrial Creatures; and by his Intelligence, he makes as near an Approach to Man as Matter can approach Spirit. A sufficient Proof that the Creature is not unmerited of the Knowledge of this Animal is, that the Proprietor having been absent for six Weeks, the Moment he arrived at the Door of his Apartment, and spoke to the Keeper, the Animal's Knowledge was beyond any Doubt confirmed by the Cries he uttered for, till his Friend came within Reach of his Trunk, with which he caressed him, to the Astonishment of all those who saw him. This most curious and surprizing Animal is just arrived from *Philadelphia*, on his Way to *Boston*—He will just stay to give the Citizens of *Providence* an Opportunity to see him. He is only four Years old, and weighs about 9000 Weight, but will not have come to his full Growth till he shall be between 30 and 40 Years old. He measures from the End of his Trunk to the Tip of his Tail 15 Feet 8 Inches, round the Body 10 Feet 6 Inches round the Neck 7 Feet 3 Inches, round his Leg, above the Knee, 3 Feet 3 Inches: round the Ancle 2 Feet 1 Inches. He eats 190 Weight a Day, and drinks all Kinds of fermented Liquors; three Days he has drank 30 Bottles of Porter, drawing the Corks with his Trunk. He is of a most docile tractable Temper, and has never attempted to hurt any one. He appeared on the Stage at the new Theatre in *Philadelphia*, to the great Satisfaction of a respectable Audience.

☞ The Elephant having delivered many Papers of Consequence, it is recommended to Visitors not to come near him with black Papers.

*** A Place is fitted up for him Genteelly to receive genteel Company in a Store back of the Coffee-House where he will remain till the 8th of *July* only, as he is to be at *Cambridge* at the approaching Commencement.

Admittance, One Quarter of a Dollar—Children, One Eighth of a Dollar.

Printed by CARTER and WILKINSON.

Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson paid to see the first elephant to be exhibited in Philadelphia.

Ricky Jay Collection

President and Martha Washington were among those who paid to see the elephant on August 25, 1796, along with her grandchildren and the son of Marquis de Lafayette who was living with the Washington family.[4]

The Crowninshield elephant returned to Philadelphia in time for John Adam's inauguration in 1797 and among those who paid to see the elephant was Thomas Jefferson, who had been defeated by Adams in the Electoral College by a vote of 71-68. Under the original rules of the Constitution, the candidate who received the second most votes by the electors automatically became vice president, and in 1797 Jefferson was in Philadelphia for the inauguration of Adams and his own swearing-in as vice president.[5]

As Ricketts' fame spread, the people of Philadelphia quickly embraced his circus, and like others, when George Washington died in December of 1799, Ricketts suspended his performances out of respect to the late President. Unfor-

tunately, during the period of national mourning Ricketts' Philadelphia arena burned, possibly the work of an arsonist.[6]

The fire was believed to be one of the reasons Ricketts left America in early 1800, chartering a small sailing ship with custom made stalls for his horses and enough lumber to build a new arena in the Caribbean.

French pirates captured the ship as it was sailing south of Haiti, and while Ricketts eventually regrouped and booked passage home to England, he never made it. In late 1802, the man who launched the circus in America, and who had performed for its first two Presidents, was lost at sea.[7]

After Ricketts left Philadelphia there were very few circus performers in the United States, however, in 1802 a small outdoor show operated by a former colleague named Thomas Franklin set up on the lot at 42 South Fifth Street.[8] The performance included "feats of horsemanship" along with "ground and lofty tumbling by three young Americans."[9]

Similar troupes passed through the city until 1809 when Victor Pepin and Jean Baptiste Casmiere Breschard opened an indoor circus named the Olympic. Circuses were not yet using tents on a regular basis, and performances were often presented in a permanent structure. The Olympic was a magnificent brick building at Walnut and Ninth streets, only a few blocks from what is now known as Independence Hall.

The circus was a sensation, and in the winter of 1811-12 a stage was added so that plays could be presented when the troupe was on the road. Unfortunately, the traveling circus business was not as profitable as the shows presented in the permanent arena, and after Pepin was forced into bankruptcy, the partnership dissolved. By 1818 creditors owned the Olympic, and in 1820 it was renamed the Walnut Street Theatre. The original building, which once housed Pepin and Breschard's Circus, still stands at 825 Walnut Street, and is now recognized as the oldest operating theatre in the United States.[10]

About the same time that Pepin and Breschard started their Philadelphia circus, the man who would become America's greatest showman of the 19th century was born 150 miles away in the town of Bethel, Connecticut.

P. T. Barnum had strong ties to Philadelphia that began when he was working in a Connecticut grocery store at the age of 25. That is where one of his friends shared an astonishing story from *The Philadelphia Inquirer.* The article told of an elderly Black woman who claimed she had been owned by George Washington's father and had taken care of the President when he was an infant. What is more, she was said to be an incredible 161 years old.[11]

After Barnum read the remarkable tale, he made his way to Philadelphia where he found Joice Heth on exhibit at the Masonic Hall. Barnum later wrote that was when he "began life as a showman," displaying her first in Philadelphia, followed by appearances in New York, Boston and other New England cities.[12]

Joice Heth died the following February, considerably younger than claimed, and in the decades that followed Barnum frequently returned to Philadelphia, the city where he once wrote that he had "at last found my true vocation."[13]

If Barnum was fond of Philadelphia, its citizens returned the favor. In 1847 the showman began touring the east coast with Charles Stratton, who he promoted as General Tom Thumb. After meeting President James K. Polk at the White House, Barnum and Stratton arrived in Philadelphia on the same day as Dan Rice, who had first appeared in the city in

In 1849 P. T. Barnum expanded on the success he had in New York when he opened Barnum's New Museum at the corner of Chestnut and Seventh streets. He sold the museum to help finance Jenny Lind's concert tour. Library Company of Philadelphia

the winter of 1845-46 at Rufus Welch's National Amphitheatre.[14]

Those who caught a glimpse of the two on the streets of Philadelphia marveled at the sight. "Both were superior in their way," the *Public Ledger* reported. "The tiny equipage of the Lilliputian General was drawn by wee ponies, under the command of a little driver and footman…the magnificent carriage of the clown, with its scarlet velvet cushions and satin drapery, is the most superb ever turned out by any of our coachmakers." Dan Rice's carriage had been built in Philadelphia, reportedly at a cost of $2,000.[15]

The celebrated clown became a regular in Philadelphia, both under canvas and in theatres, returning nearly every year for decades. During that early period, Rice worked for the Philadelphia-based Hemmings & Cooper Circus and years later one of the show's owners, Richard Hemmings, said that although he paid the clown an astonishing $1,000 a week, the circus still made money.[16]

In an era when a skilled craftsman in Pennsylvania made 15-cents an hour,[17] P. T. Barnum and Dan Rice were not timid when boasting of their wealth. In 1847 Barnum and Tom Thumb were in Philadelphia for twelve days and they generated $5,594.90, against daily expenses of $25 to $30.[18]

Clearly there was money to be made in the nation's second largest city, and two years after Tom Thumb first appeared in Philadelphia, Barnum purchased William Swaim's "Atheneum and National Museum" at the corner of Chestnut and Seventh streets. The showman immediately repeated the success he had experienced with his American Museum in New York when he opened "Barnum's New Museum" in Philadelphia in 1849.

Barnum operated the "New Museum" until 1851 when the building and its contents were sold to a local showman named Clapp Spooner for $40,000. Spooner's management was short-lived however, as only a few months after he took possession, the museum – and most of its contents – were destroyed in a fire.[19]

Barnum's decision to sell the Philadelphia museum may have been linked to a telegram that he received in the winter of 1850. Barnum had been negotiating for months to bring a Swedish soprano named Jenny Lind to the United States, and even though he had never heard her sing, he was convinced that he could successfully promote her in a series of concerts.

Barnum was working in Philadelphia when he received word that Jenny Lind had agreed to his proposal, but she demanded an advance fee of $187,500. Despite his considerable wealth, the showman had not anticipated the front-end payment. To raise the money, he was forced to mortgage or sell all of his commercial and residential property, including the museum.

Still short of the deposit, Barnum convinced a Philadelphia minister named Abel Thomas to lend him the final $5,000. Thomas made the loan with the belief that "The Swedish Nightingale" would have a positive impact on the morals of America.

The gamble paid off and the tour was a smashing success. The eight concerts in Philadelphia generated nearly $49,000 and when the total box office numbers were tallied the tour grossed over $700,000. Jenny Lind received about $210,000 and Barnum claimed to have pocketed well over a half-million dollars.[20]

To create demand Barnum would auction off the best seats in the house, and in Philadelphia the first seat sold for $625. Jenny Lind's opening night performance in Philadelphia grossed $12,000, an astronomical amount far beyond the reach of most Americans who were more likely to buy a reasonably priced ticket to a traveling circus.

For only 25-cents the average Philadelphian of the mid-19th century could see a show such as Stone and Rosston or Nixon's Cremorne Circus which set up on vacant lots like the baseball field at Carma's Woods. That is where Hemmings and Gardner presented a performance in June 1860 that featured Richard Hemmings on a tight wire along with the horsemanship of Mademoiselle Camille and Miss Eliza. The star of the show was "the Philadelphia favorite," a clown named Dan Gardner. Only a few weeks later, another long-forgotten circus with the name of Roemer & Hun set up in Woodville Park where the Whitby and Whittaker families presented "A Grand Equestrian Performance."[21]

Small circuses continued to visit Philadelphia throughout the Civil War, a time when the city was prospering, and a local horse dealer became rich supplying the Union army.

Adam Forepaugh was born in Philadelphia in 1831 but left home at an early age and moved to Cincinnati and later New York where he became successful buying and selling horses.[22]

Near the end of the Civil War, Forepaugh sold 44 horses on credit to a fellow Philadelphian named John "Pogey" O'Brien. When O'Brien, who owned the Tom King Excelsior Circus, could not pay for the horses, Forepaugh became his partner.[23]

Adam Forepaugh and Pogey O'Brien soon purchased the Jerry Mabie Menagerie and fielded two units: The Great National Circus, along with a show named after the famous clown Dan Rice. Forepaugh soon sold the Great National Circus and renamed the Dan Rice Circus after himself.[24]

Over the next 15 years Forepaugh's Philadelphia-based operation flourished and he soon became a rival to P. T. Barnum who had been coaxed out of retirement to lend his name to *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

It was that competition between Adam Forepaugh and P. T. Barnum that launched the golden age of the American circus.

The two men had very different personalities,[25] and while Barnum had become wealthy as a showman, Forepaugh's fortune came from his business acumen, experience

he channeled into his new profession. While Barnum was more polished than Forepaugh, both shared a flair for promotion as evidenced by ads for an early performance of Forepaugh's circus in October of 1867.

That fall Philadelphia newspapers promised what Forepaugh claimed was "the largest menagerie in the world" to be set up at the corner of Broad and Wallace streets. The collection included 28 cages, as well as a giraffe, two baby elephants, cheetahs and tigers, along with a zebra, a camel, a polar bear and dozens of other animals.

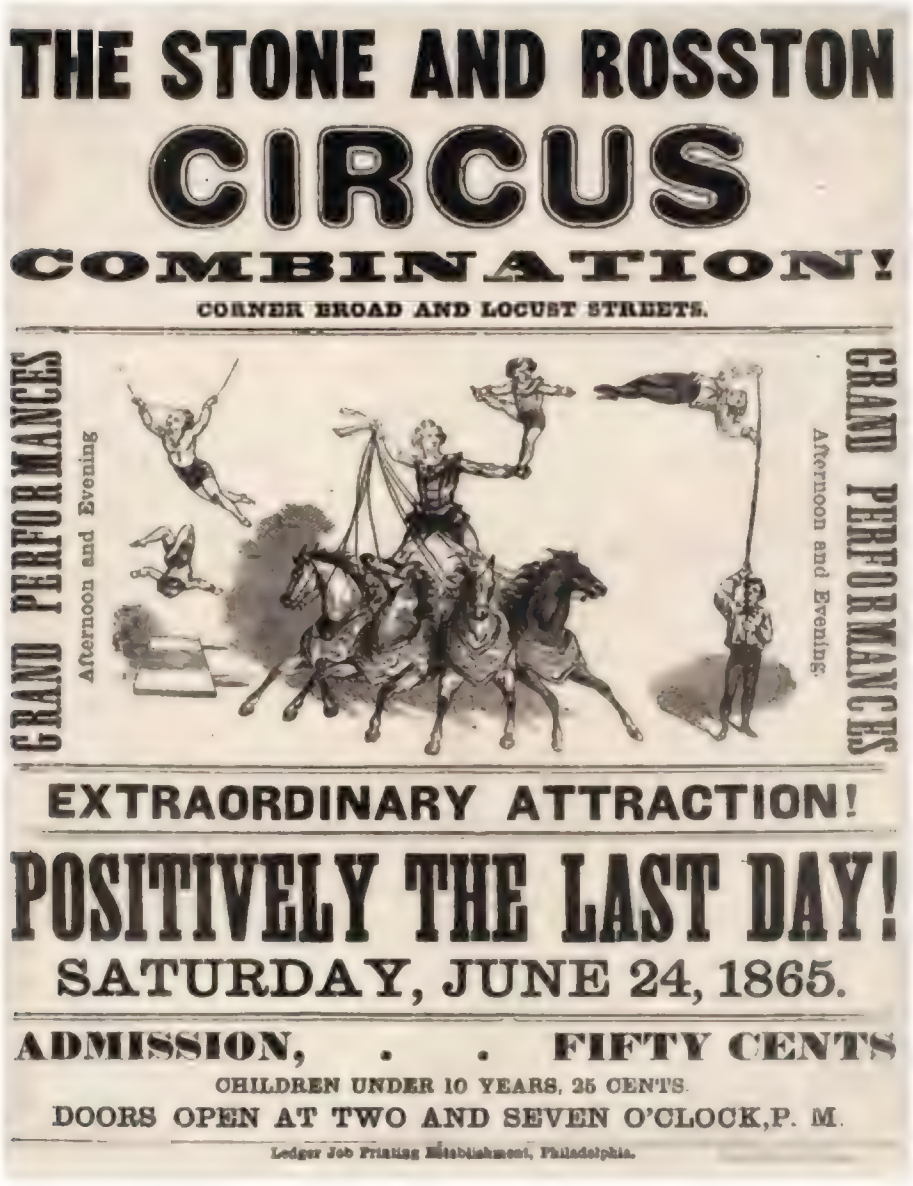
Aside from the menagerie, the performance was held in one ring and featured "the finest horses and ponies ever seen in an equestrian establishment."

Forepaugh's scrappy reputation was already apparent as he lobbed threats and insults at his competitors. Newspaper advertising that October stated that:

> "Mr. Forepaugh wishes to implicitly inform the people of Philadelphia that HIS GREAT SHOW is in no way nor manner connected with that DISREPUTABLE AFFAIR CALLED WHITBY AND CO.'S COMBINATION which exhibited at the Rink in August, and which by misrepresentation and other nefarious acts so DISGUSTED AND IMPOSED on the public – USING THE NAME FOREPAUGH ON THE SIDE OF ONE OF ITS WAGONS."[26]

Whitby and Co.'s was the circus that Forepaugh's former partner Pogey O'Brien operated in 1867.[27]

Forepaugh's fearless attitude was matched by innovation, and those who made their way to the Forepaugh circus in 1869 were among the first to see two separate tents for the menagerie and the performance.[28]



By the mid-19th century, small circuses such as that operated by Den Stone and F. H. Rosston provided Philadelphians with entertainment at a reasonable cost. Library Company of Philadelphia

In addition to those "renowned in the equestrian and acrobatic world," the show promised the largest and smallest elephants in the world and the only white camel. Admission to see the circus *and* menagerie was 50-cents for adults, 25-cents for children under the age of ten.[29]

When the 1871 season ended, Forepaugh returned to the Philadelphia winter quarters that he had built on a large plot of land on North 22nd Street between Nassau and Bolton. That February, as wild animal trainer Alexander Darious was working with a tiger, the cat turned on him, knocking him to the ground. According to press reports, Adam Forepaugh himself rushed to the cage and pulled one of the tiger's hind legs through the bars. The distracted cat then turned his attention to Forepaugh, and Darious was able to escape with only minor injuries.[30]

Two days later one of Adam Forepaugh's brothers was attacked by a dangerous male elephant named Romeo.[31] According to bystanders, the elephant picked up George Forepaugh with his trunk and threw him to the ground. Another brother, Charles Forepaugh, diverted the elephant's attention so that the injured man could crawl to safety.[32]

While the circus was still preparing for its spring tour, Forepaugh approached the city council about leasing the plot of land at Broad and Market streets known as Penn Square. Since 1901 the block in the center of the city has been occupied by Philadelphia City Hall, but in 1872 it was still a vacant lot.

The city council gave Forepaugh permission to lease Penn Square for $125 a day for one week, with the promise that he would leave the grounds "in as good of condition as when he took them."[33]

Yet despite governmental approval, Forepaugh opted to start the 1872 season in Washington, D.C. rather than Philadelphia.

That decision was a tactical error, as P. T. Barnum moved to challenge Forepaugh's dominance with his "Great Traveling Exposition and World's Fair" which arrived by rail. Even before the circus opened on April 22 the local newspapers predicted success for Barnum. "He never does anything on a small scale," *The Inquirer* wrote, adding, "Whatever he undertakes, he resolves to make a giant success and he never fails."[34]

Barnum also generated headlines when he invited all of Philadelphia's orphans to attend a special free performance on the morning of April 23. Barnum wrote: "No distinction is made in regard to sex, sect, nationality or color, my desire being to gratify and interest these poor waifs and leave pleasant lifelong impressions on their minds."[35]

The day before his circus opened in Philadelphia, Barnum himself spoke before a large crowd at the city's Concert Hall. After the group was seated, the teetotalling showman delivered what was described a "polished and witty" lecture on the dangers of alcohol, and the importance of moderation.[36]

Although Forepaugh did not exhibit in his hometown in 1872, others tested the waters that year including his old partner Pogey O'Brien who set up his big top at the corner of 30th and Market Street.

During his career O'Brien was associated with at least 17 different shows, and over the years he developed a reputation of presenting "threadbare programs" for the sole purpose of taking advantage of those who congregated on the showgrounds.[37] That reputation was reinforced in 1873 when a Philadelphia policeman watched a man leaving the big top put his hand in a lady's pocket and snatch her watch chain. The pickpocket was quickly arrested, and when he arrived at the jail authorities discovered that he had been released that same day after serving a one-year sentence for the same crime.[38]

Just two days after the pickpocket was collared on the O'Brien lot, a new show – Howe's Great London Circus – made its first appearance in Philadelphia at the corner of 13th and Thompson streets. The performance featured the Dockrill Troupe of equestrians, as well as the Romelli aerial act and a tiger act presented by "Montano the Cannibal." The Howe's Great London Circus of 1873 carried five elephants and a menagerie that claimed to hold "wild beasts from every region of the earth, wonderfully trained and attended by native keepers."[39]

A review of the show said that it was well attended, and "The Dockrill troupe is one of the best that has ever visited the city."[40]

The public's interest in circus performances was bolstered only three weeks after Howe's Great London left the city when Van Amburgh and Co.'s circus and menagerie arrived on the same lot at 13th and Thompson streets.

Despite a multitude of opportunities to see circus performances that spring, it was not until September that P. T. Barnum's Great Traveling World's Fair made its grand entrance into Philadelphia. The elaborate street parade was followed by a performance presented under an enormous tent at Broad and Diamond streets, billed as "the only grounds large enough in Philadelphia for this mammoth exposition."[41]

One of those who saw the circus wrote, "The exhibition as a whole is a remarkable evidence of Mr. Barnum's wonderful energy and enterprise…Barnum's brand-new show is far superior to anything of the kind ever before exhibited in Philadelphia and merits every claim of being *'The Greatest Show on Earth.'*"[42]

Although Forepaugh's route again bypassed his hometown in 1873, at the end of the season he returned to his winter quarters where a large stone building caught fire just before Christmas. More than a dozen circus wagons were consumed by the flames and while the menagerie animals escaped unharmed, four horses were killed. Damage to the winter quarters building on Wister Street just above Mill was estimated at $80,000.[43]

Despite the setback, Forepaugh opened his 1874 season on April 6 on "the great open field on North Broad Street beyond Columbia Avenue." The circus was presented in two rings, and was advertised as "the most expensive, extensive, instructive and entertaining amusement enterprise on the face of the globe, without exception."[44]

From Philadelphia Forepaugh took his circus west and that summer, while his show was on tour in Iowa, his hometown was illuminated by brilliant lithographs promoting P. T. Barnum's Great Roman Hippodrome.

Barnum's circus trains arrived on August 24 after a lengthy two-day jump from Boston,[45] and although it was a Sunday, the big top and seats were quickly set up for a huge revival-type meeting where Barnum again lectured on the dangers of liquor. Every seat was reportedly occupied, and many others stood in the ring as Barnum told an estimated 18-thousand people how he gave up drinking at the age of 36 when he realized the negative affect alcohol was having on his business. He said he realized then that if he did not stop, he would soon die.[46]

The circus opened the next day, and halfway through the 18-day stand thousands more gathered in the streets adjacent to the showgrounds to see aeronaut Washington Donaldson launch his massive balloon appropriately named the *P. T. Barnum.*

"Never before was there such a sight as the immense number of persons that filled Broad Street and all the av-

enues leading there," an eyewitness wrote, adding, "all of the house tops in the vicinity were filled with curious spectators." Booths had been set up all along Broad Street to take advantage of the huge crowd as vendors sold beer, cakes, cigars and ginger ale."[47]

Donaldson's balloon ascensions had been a promotional tool from the time the circus had opened in New York, however when the show arrived in Philadelphia a small group of women were invited to take a trip over the city. As enormous crowds gathered, six young ladies climbed into the basket with Donaldson and waved their handkerchiefs as the balloon lifted off.

The *P. T. Barnum* took off at 4:37 P.M. and reached 2,500 feet before it descended about two hours later in northwest Philadelphia. Although the balloon and its passengers landed a considerable distance from the showgrounds, the women made it back to the big top before the evening performance began at eight o'clock.[48]

The six amateur balloonists, along with about 15,000 spectators, were treated to a show that featured 400 horses and "Miss Victoria," an aerialist who rode a bicycle "on the highwire." Not all of those in the tent had paid for their tickets, however, as the circus provided free admission to anyone who bought Barnum's autobiography, *Struggles and Triumphs*. On circus day the price of the book was reduced from $3.50 to $1.50.[49]

When Barnum returned to Philadelphia the following spring, his feud with Adam Forepaugh began heating up.

On April 12, 1875, after two weeks in New York, P. T. Barnum's Great Roman Hippodrome opened its outdoor season on the lot at Broad and Diamond streets. On the same day – and only a mile away – Forepaugh's show opened at the corner of Fourth and Berks streets. Although Barnum would spend two weeks at Broad and Diamond, Forepaugh moved around the city to three different lots as well as Camden, New Jersey, just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia.

The Philadelphia Times said that "fun reigned" during Forepaugh's performance, making special note of "the comic clowns with the ringmaster, the star riders, the elephants and camels." The critic also wrote that any adult who attended the show left feeling many years younger.[50]

Meanwhile Barnum fought back, boasting of "ten acres of widespread canvas" and a big top that held 30,000 people [the exaggerated claim may have referred to the combined matinee and evening audience on a single day].

Balloonist Washington Donaldson was also back in Philadelphia in 1875,[51] only four months before he presumably drowned, along with a passenger, when a violent storm swept his balloon over Lake Michigan while Barnum's Great Roman Hippodrome was set up on Chicago's lakefront.[52]

The Centennial International Exhibition, which commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, was held in Philadelphia in 1876 and nearly 10-million visitors attended the fair that was set up in Fairmont Park.[53]

Even before the World's Fair opened, Forepaugh was

COMING WITH P. T. BARNUM'S GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH.
CAPTAIN COSTENTENUS,
THE GREEK ALBANIAN
TATTOOED FROM HEAD TO FOOT
IN CHINESE TARTARY, AS PUNISHMENT FOR ENGAGING IN REBELLION AGAINST THE KING.

George Costentenus was among the many attractions that P. T. Barnum brought to Philadelphia in 1877. Courtesy of Potter & Potter, Inc.

jockeying for superiority in the entertainment world and once again he booked his show onto several vacant lots throughout the city. The circus opened its season on April 17 with a weeklong engagement at the corner of Broad Street and Columbia Avenue. It then relocated for two days at 11th and Wharton streets, followed by another two-day stand at 42nd Street and Lancaster Avenue in West Philadelphia. The circus also made an encore appearance in Camden.

Those on hand for the opening day performance on Easter Monday reported that the tent had eight center poles and was "filled beyond even its capacity." The show was also memorable for an act that featured eight elephants in one ring.[54]

Whether Barnum was concerned about competition from the Centennial Exhibition or Forepaugh's dominance in the city, *The New and Greatest Show on Earth* skipped Philadelphia in 1876, playing only four Pennsylvania towns that September, each more than 60 miles from the city.[55]

The next year Barnum's big top was packed on Halloween night when the old man walked into the center ring to address the enormous crowd. Among those on hand at Broad and Federal was a reporter who wrote that Barnum had spared no expense and that every feature was presented as advertised, including "Captain Costentenus, the tattooed man who was billed as 'a living art gallery.'"[56]

Unfortunately, the circus was plagued by thunderstorms, and although the show had been billed for four days, management was concerned that the big top would be damaged by the winds. On the morning of November 2, P. T. Barnum personally made the decision to end the 1877 season after only three performances and return to New York for the winter.[57]

After the performers and working men were paid off, Barnum told *The Philadelphia Times* that he was sorry to disappoint the city's children and promised, "to come along next year with a show that will gladden their hearts."[58]

Whether it was his pledge that rainy November morning – or the fact that Forepaugh was wintering nearly 3,000 miles away in Northern California – Barnum returned to Philadelphia the following April, opening on the same showgrounds where his circus had closed the 1877 season.

The veteran showman again made a personal appearance at each performance where he bragged of the new "20 Trained Royal Stallions" which he claimed cost $150,000. Barnum's press agents also boasted that he had invested one million dollars in "acting elephants, trained tigers and lions," as well as "a colossal carnival congress of the wonder

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2-HEADED NIGHTINGALE
6 DAYS LONGER
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COUNT ROSEBUD.
2 Heads 4 Arms Feet. 1 Body
Speaking on Two Different Topics at the Same Time, in Two Different Languages
BARON LITTLEFINGER and COUNT ROSEBUD
The Broncho Horses, Fryer's Dogs, Trained Animals and Equestrian and Acrobatic Artists.
Friday Afternoon & Ev'ng, Dec. 27
TESTIMONIAL BENEFIT
CHARLES H. DAY
PRODIGIOUS PROGRAMME OF
ENORMOUS ATTRACTIONS!
NOTE. The Equescurriculum is comfortably heated, making this admirably adapted building a Cosy FAMILY RESORT.
POPULAR PRICES
ADMISSION, 50 CENTS
CHILDREN, under 9 years, 25 CENTS

In 1878 P. T. Barnum's former partner William Cameron Coup brought a circus to Philadelphia that featured Millie and Christine McCoy. During their performance the conjoined twins would harmonize popular songs, with one of them singing soprano and the other alto.

The Ringling, Tibbals Circus Collection

world."[59]

With Forepaugh touring the west, William Cameron Coup, who with Dan Castello had persuaded Barnum to enter the circus business, brought a new show to Philadelphia in the fall of 1878. The original partnership with Barnum had ended several years earlier, and Coup now brought his own circus to Broad Street just above Arch near where the Philadelphia Convention Center now stands.

One of those who attended "W. C. Coup's Equescurriculum" described it as "devoid of all objectionable features." The highlight of the show was a menage act presented by Miss Emma Stokes that featured a horse which was "equal to anything" ever seen in Philadelphia.[60]

Another newcomer to Philadelphia in 1878 was a big circus owned by James E. Cooper, native of the city, and James A. Bailey. After an extensive tour of Australia, New Zealand and South America, Cooper & Bailey made its way to Philadelphia[61] where it established winter quarters at 23rd Street and Ridge Avenue. That is where scientists were summoned to the elephant barn in the early 1879 after keepers suspected that a female named Hebe was pregnant.[62]

If the baby survived it would be the first elephant born in America.

The pregnant elephant generated newspaper copy for weeks, but the biggest event happened when Cooper & Bailey opened its season on the same Philadelphia showgrounds where Barnum had appeared the previous spring.

Those who made their way to the corner of Broad and Federal streets on the night of April 19, 1879 experienced something never before seen at any circus.

"On Saturday night, when people first entered the menagerie tent, it was as light as midday and a man's shadow reflected on the ground was as clear and clean-cut as if it were done in silhouette," *The Philadelphia Times* reported. "Above the head burned what appeared to be two small balls of fire, without any flame or smoke, and of such dazzling brilliancy that the naked eye could hardly stand the glare for an instant."[63]

Electric lighting had arrived, and the first public appearance was on a circus lot in South Philadelphia.[64]

P. T. Barnum was still using oil lamps to light his showgrounds that year, and when his *New and Greatest Show on Earth* set up in Philadelphia that autumn, that oil nearly caused a disaster. Shortly after midnight on October 3 a watchman smelled something burning and as he walked outside the big top, he saw the menagerie tent was on fire. Eyewitnesses said the animals "caused a commotion" as flames engulfed several cage wagons before being quickly extinguished.[65]

With disaster narrowly avoided, enormous crowds flocked to Barnum's circus. When it became impossible for street cars to force their way through the mob they were forced to stop far short of their destination. Newspapers reported that "Policemen, of whom there were a great number, were as powerless as straws on a raging sea."

The massive crowd at the corner of Broad and Dickinson was boosted by "the peanut men, the lager beer men, the sideshow men, the telescope man, the apple man and the thousand and one other men of various walks and pursuits in life gathered there to get the crumbs of the great financial slice that goes as the share of Barnum."[66]

Once again many of those who made money from the circus were not directly involved with the show, but merely taking advantage of the enormous crowds.

Cooper & Bailey returned to winter quarters at 23rd Street and Ridge Avenue at the end of the 1879 season and it was there that a baby elephant was born on March 10, 1880. The elephant, named "Young America," was described as being "not much larger than a Newfoundland dog."[67]

The birth of the baby elephant was the talk of Philadelphia, and hun-

America was the first elephant born in the United States. Crowds flocked to the Cooper & Bailey winter quarters in Philadelphia to see the baby elephant, in some cases offering bribes to enter the elephant house. Private collection

P. T. BARNUM'S GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH
AND THE
GREAT LONDON CIRCUS.
SANGER'S ROYAL BRITISH MENAGERIE
AND
GRAND INTERNATIONAL ALLIED SHOWS.
UNITED
For an Experimental Season, the Year 1881 Only.
P. T. BARNUM, JAMES A. BAILEY & JAMES L. HUTCHINSON,
SOLE OWNERS.
4 LARGEST SHOWS
4 BEST SHOWS
RESIDENCE OF GEN. TOM THUMB.
GEN'L TOM THUMB.
TINY LAVINIA WARREN.
THE PETITE GENERAL AND HIS BEAUTIFUL SPOUSE AS THEY HAVE APPEARED BEFORE THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND AND EVERY CROWNED HEAD OF EUROPE AND THE OLD WORLD — THE SMALLEST WEDDED PAIR ON EARTH.
GENL. TOM THUMB AND WIFE - LAVINIA WARREN.
THE GENERAL WAS FIRST PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC IN THE NEW YORK MUSEUM OF P. T. BARNUM, DECEMBER 8, 1842, AND IN A FEW MONTHS WAS RENOWNED ALL OVER THE UNION AS NOT ONLY THE SMALLEST BUT THE MOST INTELLIGENT MIDGET EVER SEEN. PRESENTED TO THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND IN FEBRUARY, 1844. INTRODUCED TO KING LOUIS PHILIPPE OF FRANCE, IN PARIS, THE SAME YEAR. TRAVELED ALL OVER THE CONTINENT, RECEIVING BRILLIANT OVATIONS FROM KINGS, QUEENS, PRINCES, AND ROYALTY EVERYWHERE. MISS LAVINIA WARREN WAS FIRST PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC IN P. T. BARNUM'S NEW YORK MUSEUM, IN 1862. FIRST MET GEN. TOM THUMB THE SAME YEAR, AND AFTER A BRILLIANT COURTSHIP, THEY WERE MARRIED FEBRUARY 10, 1863 IN GRACE CHURCH, NEW YORK, IN THE PRESENCE OF GOVERNORS OF SEVERAL STATES, SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN IN GREAT NUMBERS, AND MANY GENERALS OF THE ARMY. MANY THOUSAND PEOPLE ATTENDED THE RECEPTION AT THE METROPOLITAN HOTEL, THE NEXT DAY, AND THE COUPLE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY VISITED PRESIDENT LINCOLN IN WASHINGTON CITY. SINCE THEN THIS WEDDED PAIR OF HAPPY DWARFS HAVE MADE THREE COMPLETE TOURS AROUND THE WORLD, FOR PLEASURE AND PROFIT. AFTER A LONG ABSENCE, THEY ARE ONCE MORE PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC, BY BARNUM, BAILEY & HUTCHINSON, AT A GREAT WEEKLY OUTLAY, AND THIS
WILL POSITIVELY BE THEIR LAST SEASON ON EXHIBITION,
PRIOR TO A WELL-EARNED RETIREMENT.

dreds made their way to the circus winter quarters, in some cases offering bribes for the chance to enter the elephant house.[68]

Both Forepaugh and Cooper & Bailey spent the winter of 1879-80 in Philadelphia, and in a stunning development, rather than compete against each other when they opened, they combined their shows for two weeks starting April 12. The first circus performance was preceded by a torchlight parade featuring 600 horses, 100 ponies, 40 chariots, 120 animal cages, six brass bands and 40 camels.[69]

Enormous crowds pushed and jostled each other as they rushed to the ticket wagons for a two-ring performance that included acts from both Cooper & Bailey and Forepaugh "performed in friendly rivalry." There was no distinction of who worked for which show, and only the names on the wagons indicated there were two separate circuses on the lot.

A great feature of the performance was when James A. Bailey entered the ring and announced that the baby elephant was about to be exhibited. One of those in the audience wrote that Bailey's statement was followed by a shout "that could be heard for blocks."[70]

When the Philadelphia stand ended, Forepaugh and Cooper & Bailey each began their separate tours, and at the conclusion of the 1880 season James Cooper and James Bailey dissolved their partnership. Bailey then purchased Cooper's interest for $45,000 and became sole owner of the circus.

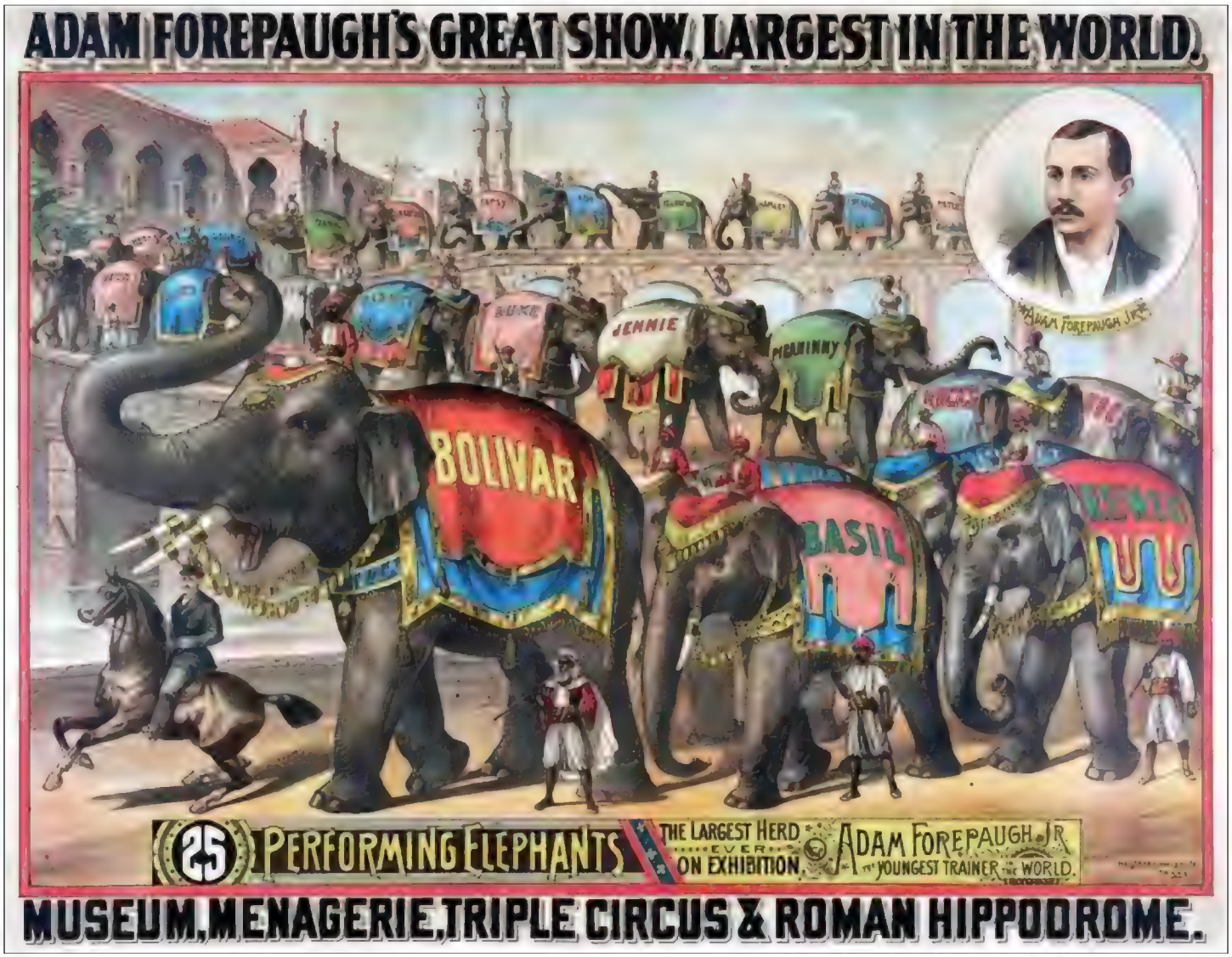
The surplus equipment and animals from Cooper & Bailey were sold at auction on November 5 at a railroad depot located at 23rd Street and Columbia Avenue. About 70 horses were sold as well as tents, costumes and cage wagons. Most of the equipment and animals were sold to Adam Forepaugh and Pogey O'Brien and those attending the auction said many of the items "went for a song."[71]

The following spring James A. Bailey partnered with P. T. Barnum, and Forepaugh continued his battle for dominance.

In 1881 Forepaugh featured Louise Montague, billed as "The Most Beautiful Woman in the World," along with a free parade titled "La Rookh's Departure from Delhi." Before the season opened in Philadelphia, Forepaugh negotiated with the federal government to put up posters on the fence surrounding the new Post Office at Ninth and Chestnut streets. According to *The New York Clipper* it was the first time that advertising was ever allowed on Post Office property, adding that the lithographs had transformed the fence into a "magnificent art gallery."[72]

Only seven days into Forepaugh's two-week stand in

P. T. Barnum brought Charles Stratton to Philadelphia in 1847. Thirty-four years later this lithograph was used to promote his final appearance with The Greatest Show on Earth. Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society


ADAM FOREPAUGH'S GREAT SHOW, LARGEST IN THE WORLD.
BOLIVAR
JENNIE
BASIL
25 PERFORMING ELEPHANTS
THE LARGEST HERD EVER ON EXHIBITION.
ADAM FOREPAUGH JR.
THE YOUNGEST TRAINER IN THE WORLD.
MUSEUM, MENAGERIE, TRIPLE CIRCUS & ROMAN HIPPODROME.

Although P. T. Barnum boasted that his circus was bigger, rival Adam Forepaugh responded with a campaign that hyped Bolivar, an elephant he claimed was larger than Jumbo. The Ringling, Tibbals Circus Collection

Philadelphia *P. T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth* set up a few blocks away on Broad Street just above Columbia Avenue.

The battle was fierce.

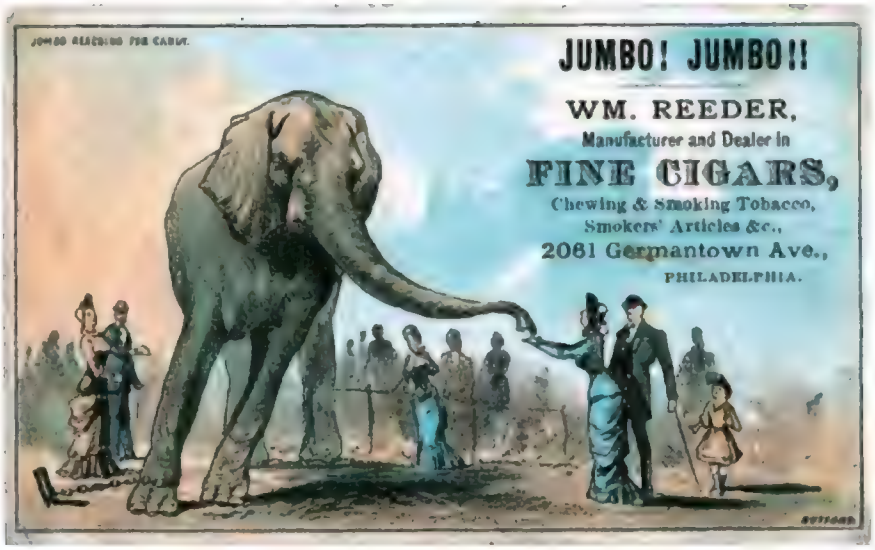
In a war fought with newspaper ink and poster paste, Barnum pledged "my personal honor and my managerial reputation of nearly 50 years, that never before within the memory of man nor the pages of history, and probably not since the creation of the world, has there been a combination of exhibitions of such a stupendous nature as my 'Greatest Show on Earth' in conjunction with 'The Great London Shows.' "

One of the featured attractions in 1881 was the return of Charles Stratton, 34 years after he first appeared in Philadelphia as General Tom Thumb. Those who lined the parade route saw Stratton and his wife Lavinia riding in a miniature carriage drawn by tiny Shetland ponies. For the first time the Barnum program was presented in three rings, and during the performance Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb appeared in the center ring where they received a tremendous ovation.[73]

Newspaper readers also saw an advertisement which stated: "Certainly no sane man in or out of the profession would dispute the apparent fact that P. T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth and The Great London Circus, before the present consolidation were individually unequaled in every department necessary to make up a perfect exhibition."[74]

Forepaugh shot back and sued P. T. Barnum, James A. Bailey and James L. Hutchinson for conspiracy, claiming that they damaged his business by spreading false advertising that his show was made up of "old stuffed snakes, blind horses, dilapidated cages, rotten canvas and worn-out wardrobe."

Forepaugh asked the court for damages in excess of $50,000,[75] and although there is no record on how the case was settled, or how much Forepaugh generated at the ticket wagon in Philadelphia that season, the stand was profitable for Barnum, Bailey and Hutchinson. According to records kept by P. T. Barnum's personal secretary, Henry Bows-



Philadelphia businesses capitalized on the frenzy that accompanied Jumbo's arrival in 1882. Merchants created collectable "trade cards" which provided advertising for their stores and products.

The Ringling, Tibbals Circus Collection

er, the six-day engagement in 1881 generated revenue of $16,257.90.[76]

The battle resumed the following year when Philadelphia was covered with posters and billboards touting the arrival of Forepaugh's Big Bolivar, "the most stupendously gigantic elephant on earth."[77]

Seven days later an even bigger elephant appeared in the city.

Shortly before Jumbo arrived in Philadelphia, P. T. Barnum checked into the Continental Hotel during the "paper war" and challenged Forepaugh to meet him in the lobby.

Although Forepaugh did not appear, the city's press corps did, and Barnum issued a challenge. "Let him sue me for telling the truth if he dares, and I will sue him for damages in every town where he shows this season under bills falsely declaring that he exhibits what he has not, but which I have." Eyewitnesses said that Barnum's face brightened when he added, "We will give the people of Philadelphia the finest show ever exhibited."[78]

As the debate began over which elephant was bigger and which circus was better, the Barnum & London train arrived in two sections at 8:15 on the morning of April 23, 1882. Because it was a Sunday, Philadelphia's police chief told the animal handlers that the cars could not be unloaded until 10:00 A.M. James A. Bailey then cornered the officer and explained that the animals had to be fed immediately. The police chief conceded, and the cars were quickly unloaded. Thousands watched the procession to the lot, and "even ladies on their way to church stopped with prayer books in their hands" to obtain a glimpse of the animals.[79]

That same day Forepaugh offered $5,000 to any circus owner in America who could prove that his show was bigger. He also suggested that an independent committee compare the two circuses and whoever had the smaller show should donate $5,000 to either an orphanage or home for the aged.[80]

Barnum fired back with newspaper ads that invited the public to compare the size of the two shows. Spectators were encouraged to visit the tents and "take your tape line and measure them and be convinced that they are twice the size of anyone else's." The advertisements also claimed that Jumbo was "twice as large as any other elephant," with a trunk that reached 26-feet, and "ears as large as parlor doors."[81]

The controversy evidently paid off for both shows. The opening night crowd at Forepaugh's circus was described "as great as ever,"[82] and at the conclusion of the week-long stand Barnum & London claimed that $65,000 had been generated at the ticket wagon, $8,000 more than had ever been generated during any week per-

William "Buffalo Bill" Cody made dozens of appearances in Philadelphia between 1873 and 1916. In 1882 he appeared in a play at the Walnut Street Theatre. The building, constructed in 1809 as an indoor circus, now holds the distinction of being the oldest theatre in the United States.

Huntington Library

forming at Madison Square Garden.[83]

Later that year, after both shows had completed their seasons, a popular stage performer made an appearance at the Walnut Street Theatre. William F. Cody, who had made his Philadelphia debut in 1875, appeared that December in a play titled "Twenty Days: Or Buffalo Bill's Pledge."[84] The following year Cody started "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" and in the decades ahead he would return to the city many times.

The rivalry between Barnum and Forepaugh heated up again in the winter of 1884 when Barnum announced that he had purchased a "sacred white elephant" from the King of Siam. Just before the season opened, Forepaugh quietly revealed that he too had imported a white elephant which he named "The Light of Asia."

Forepaugh's agents quickly declared that Barnum's elephant was a fake. According to newspaper reports, while Forepaugh's elephant was snowy white, the splotches of cream-colored skin on Barnum's were nothing but a skin disease. Public interest reached a fevered pitch when the shows were scheduled to exhibit simultaneously in Philadelphia.

O'BRIEN'S
CIRCUS AND MENAGERIE
Will EXHIBIT, One Week Only, in
WEST PHILADELPHIA,
ON THE BASE BALL GROUNDS, CORNER OF
BELMONT and ELM AVENUES.
Commencing MONDAY AFTERNOON, SEPT. 28,
there will be two grand, full and complete performances
each day, afternoon and night, at 2 and 8 o'clock P. M.
Doors open one hour earlier. General Admission to all only
TEN CENTS.
A few Choice Reserved Seats, 25 Cents extra.

Philadelphian John "Pogey" O'Brien presented "10-cent Shows" that attracted gangs and "hoodlums" to the circus lots throughout the city.

"The Light of Asia" was introduced at the start of Forepaugh's circus and as it stood next to a grey elephant the audience was lectured on the differences between the two animals.

After opening unopposed, Barnum, Bailey and Hutchinson's circus arrived a week after Forepaugh's premiere. According to *The New York Clipper,* Forepaugh's tent was only "moderately filled" and "taken as a whole, the business done by his circus has not been so good as the merits of the entertainment deserved."

The white elephant war continued throughout the Philadelphia stand and Barnum was challenged by Forepaugh to submit his elephant to an examination by an independent group of scientists. If they found it to be artificially colored, Barnum would have to pay $20,000 to the Odd Fellows Home.[85]

Barnum did not take the bait and although it was later announced that Forepaugh's "white" elephant soon died at the Philadelphia winter quarters, longtime showman W. C. Coup later revealed that "The Light of Asia" actually lived several more years and continued to travel with the show. According to Coup, once the whitewash was removed "The Light of Asia" was no different than any other elephant in Forepaugh's herd.[86]

In 1885 Pogey O'Brien returned to Philadelphia for the first time in many years, setting up on August 24 at the corner of Broad and Dickinson streets. During an era when Forepaugh and Barnum were touting three ring circuses, O'Brien promised "one of the best circus entertainments in a single ring along with a splendid menagerie, all for the price of ten cents."[87]

When the show opened, a mob of about 4,000 described as "principally boys and men," fought their way to the ticket wagon for the inexpensive tickets.

Even before the show began "a group of hoodlums" made their way into the ring. At that point those in the ten-cent seats stood up, blocking the view to all but those closest to the performance. Although O'Brien threatened to stop the show, his words were drowned out as men and boys jostled for position, climbing the quarter-poles and swarming over the barrier that divided general admission seats from the reserved chairs.[88]

Despite the negative publicity, O'Brien's circus played to capacity audiences for three weeks until it moved uptown from Broad and Dickinson to Broad and Diamond Streets and later to the baseball grounds at the corner of Belmont and Elm avenues.

The O'Brien circus became associated with unruly crowds, and when the show returned to Broad and Dick-

inson in 1886 a gang of rowdies broke poles and frightened the audience until an elephant was led into the tent to control the mob. The crowd then began cheering until O'Brien stopped the show because there was no room to perform.

After order was restored, O'Brien promised that there would be better management of the tickets to avoid a repeat of the mayhem.[89] An extra group of ushers was added, and a squad of special police officers was on hand for the remainder of the performances.[90]

A few days later – and only a few blocks away – there was another disturbance at a small circus owned by James Cooper, the nephew of James A. Bailey's former partner. According to police two intoxicated men entered the circus ring and mounted a small wagon at Cooper's Pony Show. A policeman was called into the ring and as he was trying to eject the pair, friends of the drunk men began attacking the officer. Another policeman in the crowd then fired his pistol which grazed one of those involved in the fight. The crowd was dispersed after some of the officers who had been assigned to the O'Brien circus a few blocks away were called to the scene.[91]

At the same time that gangs were becoming associated with the ten-cent circuses that had sprung up in Philadelphia neighborhoods, Barnum and Forepaugh made an astonishing announcement. For one week in late April of 1886, the two rivals would combine their shows in the same tent!

The enormous production, billed as "Barnum & Forepaugh's Consolidated Shows," was presented in four rings with two stages, as well as a hippodrome track nearly an eighth of a mile in length. The opening day street parade was led by the Barnum troupe and as spectators followed the wagons to Broad and Dauphin streets they were awed by "the largest tent ever put together in America, and perhaps in the world." The canvas of both shows had been laced together, and the 20,000 seats were provided by both circuses.[92]

Barnum had been offered $500 to make a public appearance at the performance, yet he declined, remarking that the program was already strong enough.

The critics agreed. The two-and-a-half-hour Barnum & Forepaugh combined circus was presented without inter-

FOREPAUGH'S GREAT AGGREGATION MUSEUM, MENAGERIE AND TRIPLE CIRCUS.
ADAM FOREPAUGH
EXHIBITING TO HIS JUVENILE FRIENDS
THE CUB LIONS & ONLY ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS EVER BORN IN AMERICA
THE LARGEST SHOW IN THE WORLD.

Adam Forepaugh was a native of Philadelphia who became rich during the Civil War selling horses to the Union army. As a circus owner, his rivalry with P. T. Barnum launched the golden age of the American circus. Cincinnati Art Museum

mission. One review listed each of the acts and stated that there were "from two to six attractions constantly before the spectator," adding "the performers in one act had hardly time to get out of the rings before they were occupied by new faces."[93]

The final Philadelphia performance of "Barnum & Forepaugh Consolidated Shows" was held May 1, 1886, and the two circus trains went their separate ways, Barnum & London to Carlisle, Pennsylvania and Adam Forepaugh to Alexandria, Virginia.[94]

The blending of the two shows signaled a truce between Barnum and Forepaugh, and although the two circuses did appear together again at New York's Madison Square Garden in 1887, *The Greatest Show on Earth* did not return to Forepaugh's hometown until 1893.

The agreement between Barnum and Forepaugh split the United States into territories. Forepaugh would appear exclusively in Philadelphia, and Barnum was awarded New York City and Brooklyn. The rest of the country was divided into sections which alternated each year. Forepaugh then won another victory when he convinced the Philadelphia city government to put a moratorium on ten-cent circuses, which essentially gave him exclusivity on his home turf.[95]

In the summer of 1886, Buffalo Bill's Wild West made its first appearance in Philadelphia, and while the Wild West was not presented under a big top, the performance at the Gentlemen's Driving Park racecourse was similar – yet different – than a circus.

Although performances by Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley were competition, Forepaugh was embracing his role as Philadelphia's local entertainment king as he expanded his presence with a Theatre and Museum on Eighth Street between Race and Vine. He turned the circus lot at Broad and Dauphin streets into a baseball field known as Forepaugh Park, home of the Philadelphia Quakers, part of the Players' League in the late 19th century.[96]

An influenza pandemic in the winter of 1890 claimed more than one million lives worldwide, including 58-year-old Adam Forepaugh who died that January. The Forepaugh circus and other assets were quickly sold to Philadelphian James Cooper for $57,000,[97] with James A. Bailey a silent partner.[98]

When the circus opened at Forepaugh Park less than four months after its founder's death, James Cooper was in New York meeting with James A. Bailey, ostensibly to extend the agreement to divide the circus territory.[99]

The next spring, as Philadelphians were preparing for the opening of the Forepaugh show, P. T. Barnum died at the age of 80.[100] Within a year, James Cooper was also dead and James A. Bailey was firmly in control of both Barnum & Bailey and the Adam Forepaugh Shows.[101]

Bailey successfully took advantage of Philadelphia's large population and its appetite for circuses when he routed Forepaugh onto the lot at Broad and Dauphin in the spring of 1893 and had Barnum & Bailey setting up on the same showgrounds that summer.

The economic depression that began in 1893 dragged on for two years, and although both shows toured in 1894, the following season Forepaugh remained at its Philadelphia winter quarters.

With only one circus touring, Bailey seized the opportunity to become a partner in Buffalo Bill's Wild West in 1895. Even though Cody's partner Nate Salisbury had fallen ill the previous season and would soon be an invalid, on April 22 he and Bailey, along with Buffalo Bill, were in Philadelphia for the season opener of the Wild West. The two-week appearance was exceptionally lucrative and during the 12-day stand Philadelphians spent more than $54,000 for tickets to Buffalo Bill's performance on the lot at 11th and York streets.[102]

Bailey's success allowed him to buy into yet another established show when he partnered with the Sells brothers of Columbus, Ohio in late 1895, and that spring the show was retitled as "Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros."[103]

James A. Bailey now had an interest in three big shows and the 1897 Philadelphia season at 29th Street and Columbia Avenue was bookended with the opening of Buffalo Bill's Wild West opening April 26 and the closing of Barnum & Bailey's season on the same lot. When the circus closed on October 9 the performers, animals and other paraphernalia were shuttled from Philadelphia to New York where they set sail for England, beginning a four-year tour of Europe.

With Barnum & Bailey overseas, Buffalo Bill opened its 1898 season at Madison Square Garden before the outdoor tour began in Brooklyn followed by Philadelphia. Shortly after the show unloaded at 29th and Columbia on Sunday May 1, a warrant was sworn out against Cody for setting up the show on a Sunday, a day of the week when "worldly employment" was not allowed. Cody claimed that the work was necessary if the show was to open the following day. Although Buffalo Bill appeared in a Philadelphia courtroom, the magistrate dismissed the charges, adding that such warrants would no longer be allowed.[104]

Forepaugh-Sells toured the west in 1898 and the only other circus of consequence to play Philadelphia that year was the tiny Sipe and Blake Dog & Pony Show which appeared on various vacant lots throughout the city.

On May 7, 1899, as Barnum & Bailey was preparing to perform in Sheffield, England, the three sections of the Forepaugh-Sells train began unloading in Philadelphia's Engleside neighborhood. It was the first big circus to appear in the city in nearly two years and the performances were sellouts.[105]

During the years that Barnum & Bailey was in Europe, the Ringling brothers began dipping into territory long associated with *The Greatest Show on Earth,* but Philadelphia was not yet on the route, with the audiences secured by appearances of Forepaugh-Sells and Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

When Barnum & Bailey returned to America in 1903, Philadelphia was one of its first stops. It had been six years since the show had appeared in the city and even though the train arrived so late that the setup was completed in the dark, on the morning of May 4 thousands lined the streets to see the parade, which was led by the new Two Hemispheres Bandwagon."[106]

The crowd that swarmed to the new lot near Fairmont Park in West Philadelphia was enormous and nearly every performance was a turn-away.[107]

Barnum & Bailey returned to winter quarters in Bridgeport, Connecticut when the 1903 season ended and Forepaugh-Sells was sent to Columbus, Ohio. When the two shows opened a few months later, New Yorkers were treated to Barnum & Bailey at Madison Square Garden at the same time Forepaugh-Sells opened its season under canvas in West Philadelphia.

Barnum & Bailey's new air-compressed stake driver made its first appearance in Philadelphia in 1905. Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society

One of those who attended that performance pointed out that "the bicycle is endeavoring to outdo the horse in the circus as well as every other realm," a reference to the fad that was sweeping the nation at the turn of the 20th century. The Forepaugh-Sells circus of 1904 featured Diavolo, who "looped the loop," Cyclone, "who rode his wheel up the perpendicular sides of a large circular chimney" and Prodigious Porthos who coasted down a long ramp before jumping a gap of about 50 feet.[108]

The Gentry Bros. Dog and Pony Show made its first appearance in Philadelphia that summer, one of four units that the Gentry brothers fielded in 1904.[109] The show that was routed into Philadelphia set up on two different lots in the city and a critic wrote that the audience was "enthusiastic," and mentioned that the performance included more than 400 ponies.[110]

Barnum & Bailey carried hundreds of horses at the time, and many were used to unload the circus train each morning and haul dozens of wagons to the showgrounds. The big show arrived in Philadelphia during a downpour in 1905, yet it did not dampen the excitement of the throngs who came to the lot at Parkside near Belmont.

Several significant events also occurred during that engagement, including the arrival of a new calliope, built by the Bode Wagon Company of Cincinnati, and distinguished by its carvings of two clowns playing an oversized brass horn. The stand was also where longtime show executive Charles Andress first demonstrated his new compressed-air automatic stake driver.

The circus did big business under the big top, as did the sideshow and black tent where early silent films were exhibited. Management claimed that it was one of Barnum & Bailey's most successful dates ever in Philadelphia.[111]

It was less than a year later when James A. Bailey contracted a staph infection while his circus was rehearsing at Madison Square Garden. His death on April 11 stunned the circus world but did not stop the show from touring, though Philadelphia was not on the itinerary. Other showmen filled the vacuum however, and on the same day that Barnum & Bailey opened its tented season in Brooklyn, the Carl Hagenbeck Greater Shows made its first appearance in Philadelphia, setting up during a snowstorm on the same Fairmont Park lot that both Forepaugh-Sells and Barnum & Bailey had first used in 1903.[112]

Only two weeks after the Carl Hagenbeck circus vacated the showgrounds, another big circus arrived. It was the first Philadelphia appearance of the Ringling Bros. *World's Greatest Shows.*

One of those to witness that first performance of Ringling Bros. wrote that it was "one of the most interesting and novel shows that has been seen under a tent in Philadelphia in many years." Of special note was the spectacle, "The Field of the Cloth of Gold" as well as "countless exhibitions

The cast of Buffalo Bill's Wild West was photographed in front of Gimbel Bros. Department Store in 1908. The store at Ninth and Market served as a downtown ticket office for many big shows. Heritage Auctions Archive

of trained animals that are a performance in themselves."[113]

It would be three years before the Ringlings returned to Philadelphia, and when the show arrived in 1909, the brothers from Baraboo not only owned the circus that bore their name, but also Forepaugh-Sells and Barnum & Bailey, which they had purchased at the end of 1907.

The Ringling Bros. *World's Greatest Shows* had made its first appearance at Madison Square Garden followed by a week in Brooklyn when it set up on a new 12-acre lot at 19th Street and Hunting Park Avenue.[114]

The ten-thousand people who crowded the Ringling big top saw a performance that included bareback riders Emma Stickney, Daisy Hodgini and Lulu Davenport as well as eight families of acrobats and tumblers. Other featured acts included the comedy slack wire act of Miguel Robledillo, the Aerial Smiths and the Flying Jordans, as well as Alexander Patty who ate, juggled and walked down a flight of stairs while standing on his head! The reviewer said while there were many great acts, a standout was Mademoiselle La Belle Roche who drove a small automobile down a ramp before making a double somersault in the air and landing on the other side of the arena.[115]

In those years the two shows alternated their annual appearances in Philadelphia and many other large cities, allowing them to present a new program each year.

One of the top acts on Barnum & Bailey in 1910 were four acrobats billed as the Deike Sisters. During a Philadelphia performance one of the sisters, Hedwig Deike, became ill as she was performing a very difficult trick. When the show ended, she was rushed to the hospital where she was diagnosed with meningitis. When the circus left for Washington on May 10, Hedwig Deike was not on the train. She died in the hospital a few days after her final performance.[116]

While the young acrobat's death was not directly tied to her performance, dangerous stunts occasionally took their toll. When the Miller Bros. and Arlington 101 Ranch Wild West was set up on Hunting Park Avenue in 1911, a young cowgirl named Goldie Saint Clair fell from her horse and was kicked in the head during an afternoon performance. Although seriously injured she returned to the arena before losing consciousness.

Saint Clair had achieved notoriety a few months before when former President Theodore Roosevelt predicted that eventually "a bad horse" would kill her. As a result, the story

The Deike Sisters were a featured attraction on Barnum & Bailey when one of the women died unexpectedly while the circus was in Philadelphia. Chris Berry Collection

of her injury was national news with some outlets reporting that she had actually died during the performance.[117] Fortunately, the woman who Teddy Roosevelt called "the bravest girl in the West" rallied, and when the show reached Brooklyn two weeks later she was literally back in the saddle performing twice a day with the cowboys and cowgirls of the 101 Ranch.[118]

Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. continued to alternate their routes each year with both circuses setting up on the lot at 19th and Hunting Park, and huge crowds flocked to the performances. Among those who may have attended the Ringling circus in 1913 was film director Cecil B. DeMille.

Some film historians believe that DeMille's inspiration for his silent film *Joan the Woman* came after he saw the Ringling spectacle "Joan of Arc" in 1913. Although there is no solid evidence that DeMille attended the Philadelphia performance that year, it should be noted that he was in the city at the same time as the Ringling circus, appearing with his play *The Reckless Age* at the Grand Opera House, only two miles from the North Philadelphia showgrounds.[119]

Shortly after Ringling left town in 1913, Hagenbeck-Wallace made its first appearance in Philadelphia, and according to the Route Book, while the crowds were not as large as expected, the newspaper reviews were very positive.[120]

Philadelphia's Gimbel Bros. department store had developed into a major retailer in the early 20th century, and for several years the flagship store on Market Street between 8th and 9th served as a downtown ticket office for both Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. In 1914 Ellis Gimbel and John Ringling began a long relationship that continued until the circus gave its final Philadelphia performance under canvas in 1956.

Whether or not he knew it at the time, Gimbel took a page from P. T. Barnum's 1872 declaration that no child should be denied the experience of seeing a circus when he invited underprivileged children to the opening performance of the circus in 1914. The tradition lasted more than 40 years, and during that time thousands of orphans, disabled children and elderly fans were treated to the excitement of circus day, paid for entirely by the department store.[121]

During the 1915 charity performance, about 15 barrels of candy, popcorn and other treats were distributed to the boys and girls who were also given the best seats in the house.[122]

Ringling's arrangement with Gimbels was not exclusive, and in 1916 the department store was also the downtown ticket office for the Buffalo Bill and 101 Ranch Shows. The performance the year before the United States entered World War I included the pageant "Preparedness," which Cody explained was created to "open the eyes of the Ameri-

When this photograph was taken in 1924, the Gimbel Bros. "circus party" was in its tenth year. When Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey closed in 1956, the department store said that it had paid for more than 350,000 children to attend The Greatest Show on Earth.

Chris Berry Collection

can people to the urgent need and necessity for preparedness against a possible foe."[123]

The following year the United States was pulled into World War I and the resulting manpower shortages and travel restrictions – as well as the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918 – pushed the Ringling brothers to combine their two shows in 1919. When the new "Super Circus" left Brooklyn in early May its first stop was Philadelphia, where the show was billed as "Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. Combined."

When the circus opened on May 5 thousands turned out "despite heavy downpours of rain, which required bales of straw to accommodate those sitting on the track."[124] The crowd at the first Philadelphia performance of the Combined Shows included 5,000 underprivileged children from 60 orphanages, hospitals and settlement houses, each of them a guest of Gimbels.[125]

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey gave its last parade in Philadelphia in 1920 but two years later the tradition returned when the Sells Floto Circus Combined with Buffalo Bill's Wild West made its first appearance in the city. On May 1, 1922, the show set up on a new lot on York Road at 10th Street, and while the circus was in town Poodles Hanneford, who had come to the United States from England in 1912, took his oath of allegiance to became an American citizen.[126]

Although Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey typically opened its tented season in Brooklyn in 1925 and 1926 the new white canvas was unrolled for the first time in Philadelphia, and in 1926 the show broke in a new lot at the corner of 11th and Erie Streets in North Philadelphia.

The circus squeezed onto the lot that was adjacent to a neighborhood of row houses blackened by their proximity to a large coal yard but on the day that the show opened the brilliant city of white canvas sparkled, as did the performance.

The program that year included wirewalkers Con Colleano, Berta Beeson, Ramona Ortiz and Maximo on the slackwire, as well as 350 trained horses, including those ridden by the May Wirth troupe, the Ernestos, the Reiffenach Sisters and the Rooneys. Animal acts included the Pallenberg bears, Alf Loyal's dogs and five rings of elephants. The fea-

RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY
COMBINED SHOWS
RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED
NEW SHOW GROUNDS 11th ST. & ERIE AV.
PHILADELPHIA
ONE WEEK
BEGINNING
MONDAY
MAY 3
NEW SHOW GROUNDS 11th ST. & ERIE AV.
TWO PERFORMANCES DAILY - AFTERNOON AND NIGHT

George Denman was in charge of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey elephant herd in 1926. According to contemporary news reports, there were 43 elephants with the circus that season. Chris Berry Collection

tured aerialists included the Siegrist-Silbon and Clarkonian trapeze acts as well as Jennie Rooney and Lillian Leitzel.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was back at 11th and Erie the following May and two days after the show left for Trenton, the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch began a six-day engagement on the same lot. Disaster struck three days into the weeklong run when a furious storm swept across the city just as the performance began. More than 1,000 spectators were buried under the wet canvas when a powerful gust swept across the lot. Remarkably, only two people were taken to the hospital.[127]

The rivalry between the 101 Ranch and Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey heated up in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and according to long time advance man Clint Finney, the Wild West never did well against the circus. Finney said that in 1930 he considered cancelling the 101 Ranch date in Philadelphia, but the rest of the route made the week necessary.

With a fierce battle shaping up, Finney ordered the full 101 Ranch advance into the city. Although John Ringling reportedly scoffed that the Wild West was wasting money and had "overbilled itself," the strong advance paid off. At a time when the nation was beginning to feel the impact of The Great Depression, Finney said that the 1930 Philadelphia stand was the biggest week in the history of the 101 Ranch show.[128]

Although times were tough, Philadelphia was a bright spot for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, and when there was concern that the performance for underprivileged children might be dropped in 1931, John Ringling stepped in. About 3,000 children attended the opening performance that year and the circus king was credited with having "personally paid for the party."[129]

The crowds were massive during those years. To meet

Although Philadelphia was more than a thousand miles from the "wild west," the urban audience flocked to performances presented by Buffalo Bill and the 101 Ranch. Posters Please, New York

the demand after the final performance at 11th and Erie, the entire show was packed and moved by the Pennsylvania Railroad a few short miles to a lot at the corner of Marshall Road and 69th Street in West Philadelphia.

Although Ringling skipped West Philadelphia in 1932, a different big show still came to the neighborhood. Only three weeks after Ringling-Barnum left 11th and Erie for Jersey City, the co-owned Hagenbeck-Wallace circus made the first of four consecutive appearances on the West Philadelphia lot, returning each year until 1935.

Even though John Ringling died before the 1937 season began, the annual "Orphan Day Matinee" that he and Ellis Gimbel had started in 1914 continued, and once again the crowds were enormous.[130]

The summer of 1937 also brought the first large truck circus to Philadelphia. On August 1 Tom Mix, the movie cowboy turned circus impresario, spent a week at 11th and Erie before the show moved about ten miles to West Philadelphia for an extra three days at 69th Street and Market.[131]

After the show was set up on the morning of Sunday August 1, Tom Mix went to Shibe Park where he watched a baseball game between the

The Tom Mix Circus became the first big truck show to visit Philadelphia in 1937. After spending a week on the showgrounds at 11th and Erie streets, the show packed up and moved ten miles for an encore performance at 69th and Market in West Philadelphia. Chris Berry Collection

Athletics and the White Sox followed by an appearance on WIP radio.[132] While he was in Philadelphia Mix spoke at one of the local men's clubs and suggested that the voting age be lowered from 21 to 18. "If a young man is old enough to be a soldier at 18," he said, "he is old enough to say something about what he is shooting for."[133]

Although the recession of 1938 had a devastating impact on outdoor entertainment, when John Ringling North brought Gargantua and Frank Buck to 11th and Erie streets that spring, the promise of the new season was as bright as the sunshine that bathed the lot on opening day. On the afternoon of May 22, Ellis Gimbel again treated thousands of the city's orphans and underprivileged children to *The Greatest Show on Earth.*

The circus in 1938 was jammed with new and exciting attractions including Terrell Jacobs, Hubert Castle and the Cristiani family, along with the Flying Concellos, Dorothy Herbert and acclaimed horseman William Heyer.[134]

In 1940 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey played its only six-day stand of the season in Philadelphia under a blue air-conditioned big top. The circus featured a number of acts that John Ringling North had imported from war-torn Europe, including trapeze artist Elly Ardelty and animal trainer Alfred Court.

Even before the trains unloaded that season, the young circus manager arrived in town with another new import from France. On May 11 John Ringling North married actress Germaine Aussey at Philadelphia City Hall. The two had met in Paris during a Christmas Eve blackout five months before.

One year later some 3,000 people gathered at the Pennsylvania Railroad siding at Broad Street and North Indiana Avenue to greet another honeymooning couple. Mr. and Mrs. Gargantua were one of the big attractions during the two-week stand where every performance was a turnaway.[135]

The positive press that North was generating turned against him in early June 1942 when the American Federation of Musicians ordered the circus band off the lot in Philadelphia. The union told bandmaster Merle Evans that they could not perform unless they were paid an additional $2.50 a week. While the music for the remainder of the season was recorded. the strike was briefly delayed until after the Gimbels charity performance for underprivileged children.[136]

When Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey could not get a license to exhibit in 1948, department store magnate Ellis Gimbel stepped in and the show set up for the first time at Lighthouse Field, a large park adjacent to a neighborhood community center in North Philadelphia.

Chris Berry Collection

NOW SELLING SPACE

PLAYING DAY AND DATE WITH RINGLING-BARNUM CIRCUS

1 ST. AND ERIE AVE., JUNE 5 TO 17, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

WANT CONCESSIONS—Legitimate Grind Stores of all kinds. No exclusive. Ball Games, Pitch-Till-Win, Spot the Spot, Fish Pond, Bowling Alley. Cookhouse, Grab, Custard, Scales, Jewelry, Novelties, etc. WANT one more Ride, Tilt Whirl, Octopus, Ridee-O.
WANT MANAGER to manage Concessions who can do repair work and make himself generally useful. Big salary.

BIGGEST TWO WEEKS IN PHILADELPHIA THIS SEASON—DAY AND NIGHT

MAX GRUBERG, P. O. Box 101, Philadelphia Pa.

Showing this week, Richmond and Orthodox Sts., Philadelphia, Pa.

From the earliest days, carnivals and sideshows set up adjacent to circuses in Philadelphia. In 1944 promoter Max Gruber placed an advertisement in The Billboard *soliciting operators who wanted to take advantage of the big circus crowds.*

John Ringling North was replaced in 1943 by his cousin Robert Ringling, and when the circus opened under canvas in Philadelphia, Merle Evans and his musicians were back on the bandstand.

Even with the musician's strike settled, the manpower shortages and transportation issues caused by World War II forced the show to extend many dates. In 1943 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey spent 12 days in Philadelphia, and in 1944 the engagement opened on June 6, D-Day.

As news filtered in from the beaches of Normandy, a massive crowd made its way to the circus at the corner of Erie and G streets. The performance that was presented on the same night that the Allies landed in Europe was a charity event to sell War Bonds. Every seat was filled and the 10,360 Philadelphians who attended the circus that night raised $1,584,500 for the war effort."[137]

Exactly one month later tragedy, struck when the big top caught fire in Hartford, Connecticut, killing at least 167 people and injuring over 700.

Despite the challenge of keeping the circus on the road, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was back in Philadelphia the following June. The opening performance in 1945 was again tied to the sale of War Bonds, but the circus was collapsing under tremendous manpower shortages. Much of the setup on the showgrounds was done by women, including Irene Ringling, wife of Robert Ringling, and equestrian director Fred Bradna's wife Ella.[138]

When the war ended Philadelphia began imposing restrictions on the circus, and there was some concern that Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey might skip the city and move to the suburbs. When Ellis Gimbel heard the news, he reminded the city council that his annual circus party benefited 10,000 underprivileged children. The city government reconsidered, and the circus was granted a license.[139]

The department store magnate died shortly after he went to bat for the circus, but his commitment continued. Ellis Gimbel set aside $50,000 in his will so that children from the city's orphanages could continue to attend the show even after his death.[140]

The post-war years brought changes to America, and at a time when circus acts could be seen for free on television, acres of land were also being gobbled up as the strong economy created a boom in real estate development.

One of the vacant lots that disappeared was at 11th and Erie where the annual sight of billowing circus tents was replaced by a new pharmaceutical factory.

With large empty parcels of land at a premium, Ringling-Barnum secured a lot that was owned by the Philco Radio and Television Corporation. It was also there, near Abbotsford and Stokely, that the Cole Bros. railroad circus made its only appearance in Philadelphia in August of 1950. The feature on the show that season was William Boyd, known to millions of children as television's Hopalong Cassidy.

Boyd left the circus after the three-day stand in Philadelphia and a few days later Cole Bros.' new owner, Arthur Wirtz, closed the show in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. While Wirtz claimed that he recouped his investment, he also said that he was "disillusioned about the circus business as a money maker."[141]

Director Cecil B. DeMille memorialized the setup of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey on the morning of May 21,1951. The circus lot at Broad and Pattison was near the Philadelphia Naval Hospital and the South City Drive-In movie theatre.

Paramount Pictures Corporation

With few suitable locations available, in 1951 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey secured a new lot near the Municipal Stadium in South Philadelphia. The lease for the public land was approved only after Mayor Bernard Samuels ordered the city council to do so.[142]

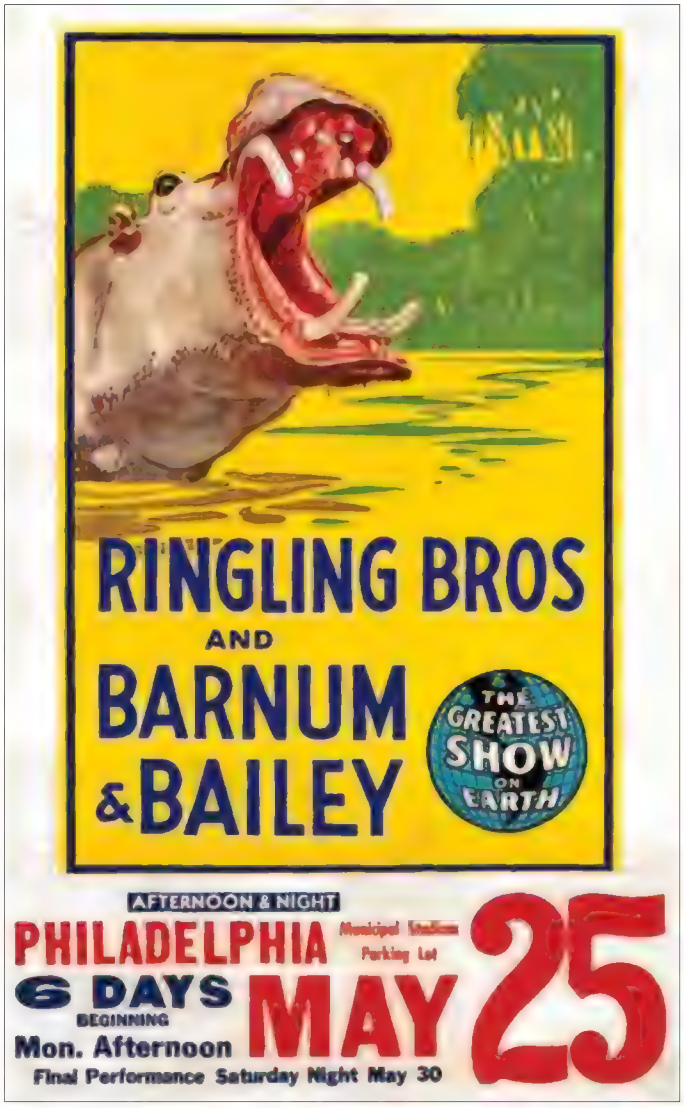
Samuels could not have known that the appearance of the circus at Broad Street and Pattison Avenue would be preserved forever in an Academy Award-winning motion picture.

PHILADELPHIA
S. Broad at Municipal Stadium
Ample Parking
6 DAYS
Twice Daily
Beginning
MON. MAY 21
Aft'n
RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS
Presenting The MIGHTIEST MULTITUDE OF FABULOUS FEATURES EVER BEHELD BY MORTAL EYE!
New Air-Ventilated Tent, Twenty Degrees Cooler Than Ever Before
TWICE DAILY — 2:15 & 8:15 — Doors Open 1 & 7
MAIL ORDERS NOW
Choice reserved grandstand chair tickets, incl. admission and all tax, now available, $3.25 and $4.25 to EVERYONE.
Specify which performance and send self-addressed envelope with check or M. O. payable to Ringling Circus Advance Ticket Dept., Philadelphia, Pa.
(Unreserved seat tickets, ADULTS $1.65 CHILDREN 85c sold only at show grounds on circus days.)
RESERVED SEAT TICKETS ON SALE
at Gimbels and Central City Ticket Office
247 S Broad Street
PHILA. CIRCUS EVENT EXTRAORDINARY
HOLLYWOOD STARS
IN PERSON SEE IN ACTION
BETTY HUTTON, JIMMY STEWART, DOROTHY LAMOUR, CORNEL WILDE, CHARLTON HESTON, GLORIA GRAHAME, Philadelphia's Own LYLE BETTGER—and the Master Producer, CECIL B. DeMILLE Himself, During the ACTUAL FILMING of Paramount's Screen Epic, "THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH," under the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Big Top in this city.

The cameras were rolling on the "gray drizzly morning" of May 21 when the first section of the circus train rolled into the Pennsylvania Railroad's Greenwich Yard, and in the hours that followed film director Cecil B. DeMille immortalized the daily routine of circus roustabouts and performers as canvas was spread and 41 tents were spotted on the new lot.

Those who watch *The Greatest Show on Earth* with a close eye may catch a glimpse of the Philadelphia Naval Hospital and the red and white striped screen of the South City Drive-In movie theatre. A keen observer can also see carnival rides operating in the distance, part of the John H. Marks Shows and the Lawrence Greater Shows that were set up on the same lot, "nibbling at Big Show patrons and overflow crowds."[143]

The midway scene also shows some of the thousands of children who were on hand for Gimbels annual circus party. That year the department store claimed it had hosted more than 350,000 children since the tradition started in 1914.[144]



When this poster was used in 1953, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey claimed to own 1,000 animals. Starting in 1951, and continuing through the end of the 1954 season, the menagerie was displayed inside the big top rather than in a separate tent.

Chris Berry Collection

Robert Houston was already a circus fan at the age of eleven, and he remembered being in the audience during the performance. "We had to go through the menagerie first. It was at one end of the big top and we were running a little late," he recalled. "After seeing the menagerie, we went into the arena area of the big top, and I remember saying 'mom it is really bright in here.' At the time I did not know they were making the movie, but in the middle of the performance they stopped the show and introduced the Hollywood stars."[145]

Although Ringling-Barnum returned to the Municipal Stadium lot for the next two years, it continued to be dogged by carnival operators who were also granted access to the public property. When the show opened in 1952, a special

Those who purchased tickets to the Philadelphia performances in 1951 agreed that their images could be used in the film that would win an Academy Award the next year.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

In 1953 the lot at Broad and Pattison was crammed with what The Billboard *called "the greatest concentration of shows ever." In addition to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, the showgrounds were occupied by the James E. Strates 40 car railroad carnival, the Penn Premiere Shows and, the John H. Marks carnival along with other rides and concessions.*

Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society

police unit cracked down on gambling near the circus lot, and while seven rackets were raided on the Vivona Bros. Carnival, police emphasized that the gambling was not tied to the circus.[146]

Because the showgrounds were on public land, the city charter required that any lease be put up for bid. In 1953 the circus lost out to two local promoters and as a result the show had to sublease the lot, as did several big carnivals.

Philadelphians who arrived on the showgrounds that season saw not only Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, but also the James E. Strates 40 car railroad carnival as well as the Penn Premiere Show, the John H. Marks carnival and many other rides and concessions. According to *The Billboard* it was the greatest concentration of shows ever, with ten Ferris wheels, and a dozen merry-go-rounds in the four-block area surrounding the Ringing big top.[147]

In 1954 the Ringling circus was able to secure a lot owned by a neighborhood community organization on the city's north side. Lighthouse Field, located at Erie and Front streets, had been used in the late 1940s and management believed the new 12-acre location would be more lucrative as it was closer to high income neighborhoods. Show executives were also pleased to get away from the carnival rides.[148]

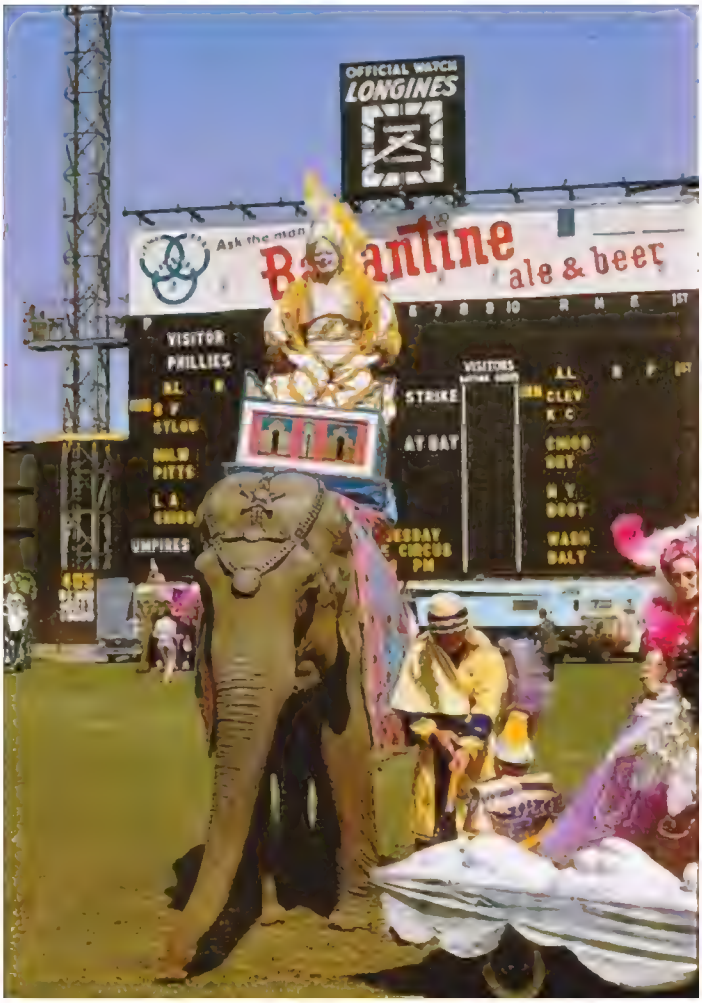
There was only one ramp to the Lighthouse Field showgrounds and when the circus wagons began arriving on May 28, 1956, both the Teamsters and the American Guild of Variety Artists were waiting for them. For months the unions had tried to organize the performers and working men, yet despite the threats, John Ringling North stood firm, claiming that neither AGVA nor the Teamsters had enough employees to act as bargaining agents.[149]

Pickets were already on the lot when more than 5,000 underprivileged and disabled children arrived for the matinee performance, and while the kids were allowed to pass, the protesters threw rocks at the circus workers, injuring one driver when they threw a brick through the cab of his truck.[150]

Police dispersed the pickets, but the matinee was delayed until about 5:00 P.M., three hours late. Halfway through the engagement a thunderstorm swept across the Lighthouse Field lot, frightening the animals in the menagerie. Five handlers were taken to the hospital for injuries they received while trying to calm the show's 17 elephants.[151]

The picketing continued for the entire run, and when the circus tried to get an injunction to stop the demonstrators, the judge ruled in favor of the unions. Problems continued to follow the circus after it left Philadelphia on June 2, until it closed six weeks later in Pittsburgh.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's final Philadelphia stand under canvas began on Memorial Day 1956. When the circus arrived at Lighthouse Field that day it was met by pickets who threw rocks at circus employees. Chris Berry Collection



Veteran Ringling clown Albert "Flo" White is seen astride an elephant at Connie Mack Stadium in 1958. The ballpark hosted the circus for two seasons after it abandoned its big top. William Woodcock, Jr. Collection

Even though Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey never again appeared under canvas in Philadelphia, there was no appropriate indoor arena in Philadelphia, and in both 1957 and 1958 the circus set up at Connie Mack Stadium, while the Philadelphia Phillies were on the road.

The huge stadium dwarfed the circus which set up rings at first and second base, as well as home plate. Each admission ticket included a raincheck in case the performance was cancelled because of inclement weather. Robert Houston remembered watching the performance in the 30,000-seat ballpark. "We were way up in the seating and you could see beyond a backdrop as preparations were being made," he recalled. "That was a bit of a disappointment to me."

While rain threatened the opening performance in 1957, the showers held off and about 6,000 were on hand for the first show under the stars.[152] Audiences at the baseball stadium continued to be light, and after the show left town it did not return to the Philadelphia area until 1960, and only then at the new Ice House arena in suburban Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

Circuses were evolving in the late 1950s, and when the Clyde Beatty railroad show transitioned to trucks in 1957 its route included many of the dates long associated with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. The Clyde Beatty Circus made its first appearance in Philadelphia that spring, setting up on the old Ringling lot at Front and Erie streets. The eight-day engagement was under sponsorship of The Lighthouse community center. Unlike Ringling, the management of the Beatty show welcomed carnival operators and arranged to share 50% of all of the money taken in by the rides.[153]

In 1958 the Cristiani Bros. Circus appeared on the same lot to benefit a new surgical wing at Nazareth Hospital. Among the performers was Emmett Kelly, who was returning to the circus after spending the 1957 season as the mascot of the Brooklyn Dodgers. "It is almost like coming home," Kelly said. "The paint on the wagons, the animals in the menagerie, the smell of the sawdust and fresh canvas. This is the circus as it should be."[154]

Kelly arrived a few days before the show and made numerous television and radio appearances. The broadcast interviews supplemented about 16,000 sheets of paper put up by Elmer Kauffman's billposters. The promotion paid off and the crowds were enormous. According to management, most of the 16 shows given during the seven-day stand were

Billposters for the Cristiani Bros. Circus put up 16,000 sheets of paper for its Philadelphia debut in 1958. The promotion paid off and most of the performances were sellouts. Chris Berry Collection

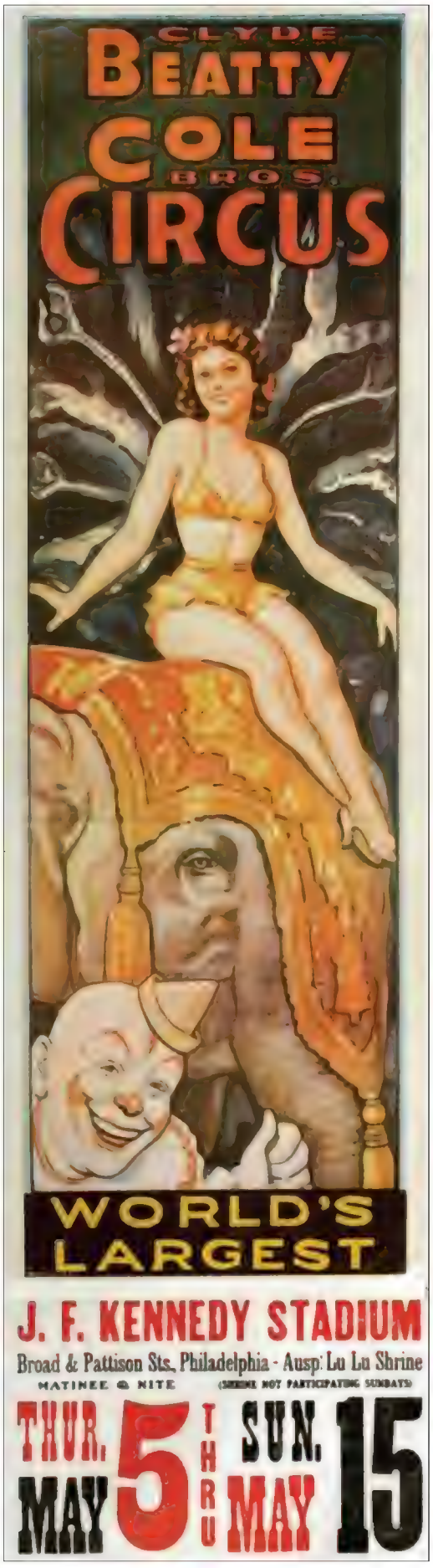
sellouts.[155]

Business was even better the next year when Cristiani Bros. returned to Lighthouse Field during Memorial Day week, sponsored by the LuLu Shrine. It was the first time the Philadelphia Shrine had sponsored an outdoor circus, and according to Lucio Cristiani the organization made more money that week than it had in 18 years of indoor performances.

The long-standing carnival midway associated with circuses in Philadelphia also scored big. There were 26 rides on the lot with Cristiani, and according to *The Billboard* the carnival grosses were double those of 1958.[156]

Even with the tremendous success Cristiani had in 1958 and 1959, the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus was able to secure the sponsorship of the LuLu Shrine in 1960. It was the beginning of a long relationship between the circus and the Philadelphia Shriners.

A brand-new big top was already in the air when the Beatty-Cole trucks rolled onto the Lighthouse Field lot in 1960, and the tradition of bringing thousands of children from the city's orphanages continued. On opening night in 1961, Boom-Boom Browning's big show band was supplemented by 100 musicians from the LuLu Shrine. The show also featured special appear-


CLYDE BEATTY COLE BROS. CIRCUS
WORLD'S LARGEST
J. F. KENNEDY STADIUM
Broad & Pattison Sts. Philadelphia - Ausp. Lu Lu Shrine
MATINEE & NITE
(SHRINE NOT PARTICIPATING SUNDAY)
THUR. MAY 5 THRU SUN. MAY 15

In 1965 and 1966, Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. set up on the same Municipal Stadium lot where The Greatest Show on Earth *had been filmed.*
The Ringling, Tibbals Circus Collection

The Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus began setting up adjacent to the Liberty Bell Park racetrack in 1967. J. Kurt Spence photo

ances by Emmett Kelly and the Wallendas.

The Beatty-Cole advance in those days was handled by veteran press agents Frank Braden and Howard Y. Bary. They got a big break in 1961 when Philadelphia's own Princess, Grace Kelly, attended the circus with her husband Prince Rainier of Monaco, and their children Princess Caroline and Prince Albert. News of their appearance was carried in newspapers from coast-to-coast.

While Beatty-Cole was set up at Light House Field in 1961, the smaller Wallace Bros. Circus was appearing in the Philadelphia suburbs, and circus fans reported seeing windows displaying posters for both circuses. Despite the opposition, no paper was covered by either show.[157]

Despite the success that Beatty-Cole had at Lighthouse Field, in 1965 the show lost the prime location to a small circus that was cobbled together by members of the Cristiani family and producer George Hamid. The show, titled Cristiani-Wallace & Hamid-Morton, was a benefit for the Deborah Hospital and featured Daviso Cristiani and a dancing stallion, Lewis Sanborn with elephants, and Clyde Beatty's stepdaughter, Albina Evans who was billed as Harriet Beatty.

Cristiani-Wallace & Hamid-Morton appeared day-and-date with Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. which continued its association with the Shrine. In both 1965 and 1966, Beatty-Cole set up at what was now known as John F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium grounds, the same South Philadelphia lot at Broad and Pattison where *The Greatest Show on Earth* was filmed.

In 1967 the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus moved its show to Liberty Bell Park, the huge thoroughbred racetrack that had opened in 1963 in North Philadelphia near the corner of Knights and Woodhaven roads.

For the next ten years the circus set up each spring at Liberty Bell Park, and once again carnival rides, owned by Amusements of America, followed the circus.

"When the show was over all of the young girls used to go to the carnival," recalled Francy Martinez Livoti, "then we would go back for the night show." Livoti spent her teenage years performing as an aerialist with the show and she said that the long Philadelphia stand provided a break from the grind of one-day stands. "It was a lot of fun."

The former member of the Ferreira's act remembered when a writer named George Plimpton joined the show at Liberty Bell Park in 1970. Plimpton described himself as a "professional amateur" who tried things most people would like to do if they only had the skill. He had already written the best-selling *Paper Lion* after quarterbacking for the Detroit Lions, had pitched at Yankee Stadium and played with the New York Philharmonic.

Plimpton spent ten days with the show where he went into a cage with Dave Hoover's big cats and was made up as a clown. His dream was to be a flying trapeze artist, and while the circus was in Philadelphia he trained as member of the

Liberty Bell Park was Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Philadelphia home for a decade. The circus appearance coincided with appearances by the Amusements of America carnival. J. Kurt Spence photo

UniverSoul first set up in Philadelphia in 1997. From the beginning, the circus worked closely with the Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation to provide circus camps for inner-city children and entertainment for community groups and the elderly. J. Kurt Spence photo

Flying Apollos trapeze act for an ABC television program titled *Plimpton! The Man on the Flying Trapeze.*

Unfortunately, Plimpton was much too tall and too heavy to be a trapeze performer. During his training, he suffered hemorrhages in both shoulders, but in the spirit of "the show must go on," he made his debut during the matinee performance on May 23, 1970. He successfully swung out, but on his return he missed the trapeze bar by inches and fell into the safety net, splitting his lip and scratching his nose. "I could not reach far enough because of my bad shoulders," he said."[158]

Phil Schacht, the catcher for the Flying Apollos, admired George Plimpton's ambition. "He fell into the net three or four times," he said, "but he kept going back up."[159]

Although the Gimbels parties had long since ended, each year Kurt and Marcia Spence did their part to expose the circus to young fans. "My wife was a teacher and each spring she would teach a unit on the circus," he said. Spence would then buy tickets for the entire third grade class and load them into cars for a trip to Liberty Bell Park. "It was not an authorized field trip, but years later people still mention how much they enjoyed their trip to the circus."[160]

After ten years at Liberty Bell Park, Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. began setting up at suburban mall parking lots in 1978, returning once more to the South Philadelphia lot at Broad and Pattison in 1981.

Carmen DiFazio was on her way home from an all-night shift as a waitress when she saw the big top. "First, I said to myself, 'They are in the wrong place, they should be at the Spectrum," referring to the indoor arena where Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey had played since 1968. "I never saw a circus in a tent," she said as she photographed the setup. Beatty-Cole was able use the lot where *The Greatest Show on Earth* was filmed with the understanding it would arrange for cleanup after it left town.[161]

In 1986 the city welcomed a new show to town when the Big Apple Circus set up for ten performances at the Eakins

The big top used by Cirque du Soleil's "Varekai" in 2002 accommodated an audience of 2,600 and stood 66 feet high. Tickets for adults ranged from $45 to $165. On opening night in Philadelphia, the performers were called back for four curtain calls. Cirque du Soleil

Oval, across from the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

"It was an extraordinary location," recalled circus co-founder Paul Binder.[162]

For Vanessa Thomas, who had first joined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey as a dancer in 1979 and later performed with Circus Vargas, her appearance with the Big Apple Circus in 1986 was her first time performing in her hometown.

"I was over the moon," she said. "I was ecstatic that my father was going to be able to see me perform. I really always wanted to have my dad's blessing. Even though I was nearly ten years into my circus career he was always saying, 'Yeah, when are you going to get a real job?'"

Vanessa Thomas was with the Big Apple Circus when it returned to Philadelphia in 1987. The theme of the show that season was "1001 Nights," and Thomas appeared in the opening street market scene with Buckles Woodcock's elephant Anna Mae. "Because of that little tiny piece in the show that year I was able to do a stand-alone act for two seasons with that remarkable elephant."[163]

The date was marred by a tragedy that occurred on opening night as a crowd of 1,600 watched aerialist Philip Beder fall 50 feet from a spinning ladder.

The act was new and as Beder was performing with his longtime partner Jim Tinsman he lost his grip. Nels Nelson was among those in the audience, and his immediate thought was that it was part of the act. "But then I realized there was no place for him to go." He said that when Beder fell, "The crowd got awfully silent."[164]

"It was devastating," Paul Binder recalled 35 years later. Although Jim Tinsman was not injured, Philip Beder was paralyzed.[165]

At the same time the Big Apple Circus was making its mark in the entertainment world, a music promoter named Cedric Walker started a new type of circus targeted to African Americans. In 1997, three years after he started UniverSoul, Walker took his circus to Philadelphia where it was set up in Fairmont Park, only a stone's throw from the circus grounds first used by Barnum & Bailey in 1903.

"The opening night was horrific," Walker said, as he recalled a snowstorm that delayed the start of the performance from 7:30 until 11:00 P.M. "We thought it was the end of our career and we thought that Philadelphia would never forgive us." His concerns were without merit when the performers received a standing ovation at the end of the show. "It was painful, but it was wonderful at the same time."[166]

In the years that followed, UniverSoul became a fall tradition for generations of Philadelphians who have brought their families to the show.

Another show that represented the evolving circus performance of the late 20th century was Cirque du Soleil which only made a handful of appearances under canvas in the city of Philadelphia. In 2001, after an absence of 17 years, and less than two weeks after the September 11 terror attacks, Cirque was booked onto a lot at Broad Street and Washington Avenue. But the initial welcome was not as warm as the one received by UniverSoul.

When the Cirque du Soleil trucks rolled onto the showgrounds, they were greeted by both a driving rain and union pickets. The circus had earlier worked out a deal with the Teamsters and stagehands union, but the pickets represented the Laborer's Union which claimed jurisdiction over the construction of the blue and yellow big top. Until the dispute was settled, none of the other unions would cross the picket line. Negotiations quickly produced an agreement and the tent started going up.[167] Tour manager Robert Mackenzie said at the time, "We will still make money, just not as much."[168]

UniverSoul has become an annual tradition in Philadelphia. Its big top is usually found in Fairmont Park, not far from where Barnum & Bailey first appeared in 1903. J. Kurt Spence photo

Despite the labor issues of 2001, Cirque du Soleil returned to Philadelphia for six weeks in the fall of 2002 with its production of Varekai. To honor the circus, a trendy bar known as L' Hexagone dispensed a vodka-based cocktail called "Varekai." Those who brought their tickets to the lounge would get the drink for free.[169]

Throughout the late 20th century and into the 21st, cir-

cuses continued to make their way to the place of its birth. After sitting out the 2020 season because of the Covid-19 pandemic, UniverSoul returned to Fairmont Park in the fall of 2021.

"It was challenging, but we had maintained our readiness throughout the year and the performers were eager and ready to go," said Cedric Walker. "It did not work out financially, but we went."[170]

Another show that braved the pandemic and visited Philadelphia in 2021 was Garden Bros. Nuclear Circus, which performed under the big top that had last been used by John Pugh's Cole Bros. Circus in 2017. The four-day stand to benefit the Ronald McDonald House was presented on the parking lot of the Philadelphia Mills Mall; the same plot of land that an earlier generation referred to as Liberty Bell Park when Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. used it for a decade in the 1960s and 70s.

Just as the showgrounds have changed, the American circus has evolved since John Bill Ricketts gave his first circus performance, but the enthusiasm of the audience has never wavered. "We have always been well received and it has always been rewarding," mused Cedric Walker. "You can still feel what the circus means to the people of Philadelphia. That warmth has always been there."[171] BW

Acknowledgements

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The circus set up in the shadow of Philadelphia Municipal Stadium in 1951. In later years Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. appeared on the same lot.

Paramount Pictures Corporation

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If Baboons Could Talk

The Circus Journey of Lee and Judy Stevens

by Julie Parkinson

Lee and Judy Stevens posed with "the Gabors," left to right: Magda, Eva, Zsa Zsa and Jolie, 1986.

Unless otherwise noted, all images are from the personal collection of Lee and Judy Stevens.

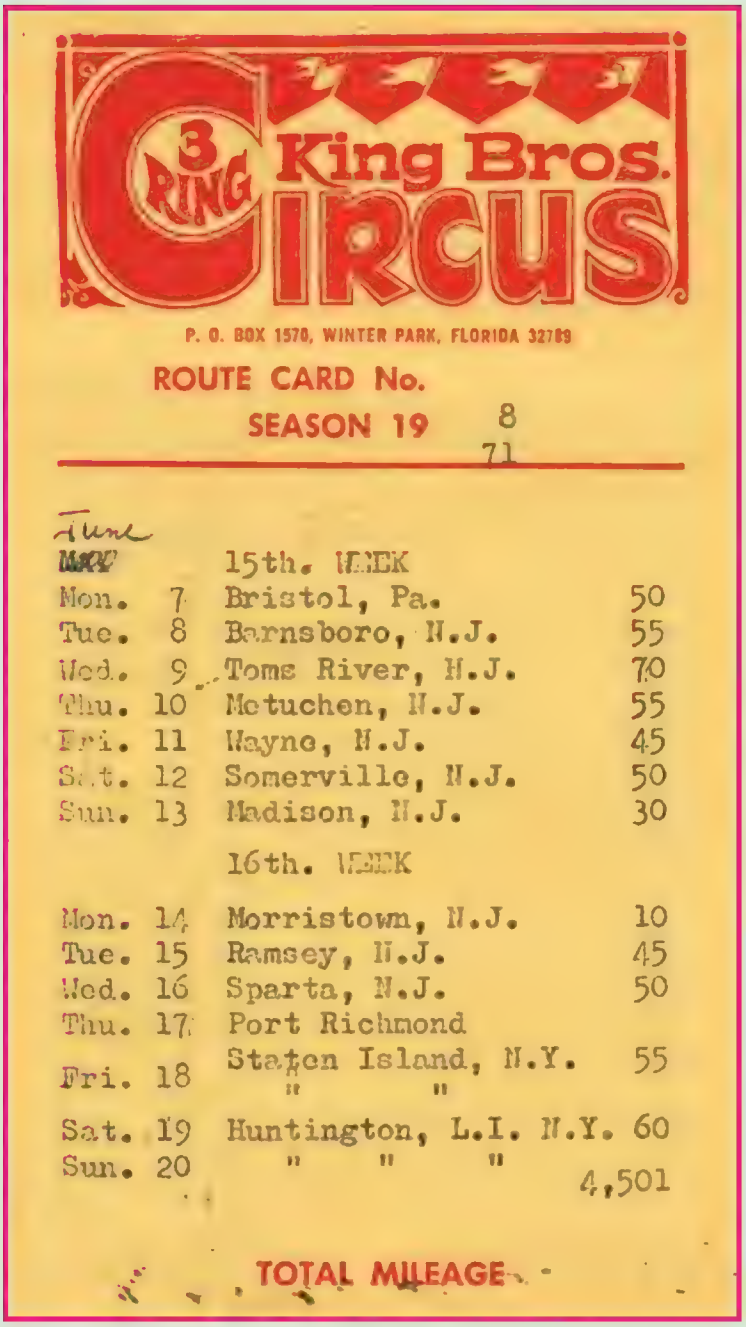
Early on the morning of June 17, 1971, in Staten Island, a 16-year-old awoke hours before sunrise, and with excitement he packed a few things in a paper bag. He peddled as quickly as possible on his Schwinn Stingray bicycle down his six-house street, continuing several miles to an empty lot which would change the trajectory of his life forever. The day before, Stephen Mitchell had read in the local paper that King Bros. Circus would be playing a rare two-day stand in the borough, and he was headed – not just to see the spectacle – but hell-bent on getting a job on the show that he had never seen before.

Born on St. Patrick's Day, 1955, and the oldest of three children, Stephen roller skated in the streets of his blue-collar Italian neighborhood and was home once the street lights

came on. Not someone who enjoyed school or studying, he nevertheless seemed to pass tests with flying colors. Stephen and his siblings were always bringing some kind of animal home. Once he and his brother devised a pulley system with the big tree outside their second story bedroom window and lowered a basket down to safely rescue a homeless dog during a winter storm. They ended up keeping the dog for a decade.

Stephen's father, William Mitchell, refused several promotions during the 47 years he worked for Proctor & Gamble because he did not want to supervise coworkers that had become his friends. The profit sharing that Proctor & Gamble offered paid off for the Mitchells years later, allowing them to retire to Sun City, Florida. Stephen's mother, Genevieve, was a homemaker who cooked macaroni for the family six days a week, later working for a brokerage firm on Wall Street.

Although they lived by meager means, each spring Bill and Genevieve treated the family to the special occasion of going to see Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. They braved through the ordeal of the journey which included catching a 30-minute bus ride from their home to the Staten Island ferry, riding the 30-minute ferry bound for Manhattan, and then taking a subway to the old Madison Square Garden between 49th and 50th streets. Once they exited the subway platform, their senses were attacked by the smells of sawdust and elephants, the sights of the concessions including the pennants and fuzzy monkeys, and the sounds of the "bug men" selling their live souvenirs. Each feeling beckoning them to the main event in a world that was glamorous and "neat." From the time he was about five, Stephen remembers the giant in the sideshow, and the timpani drum roll he would hear when the lights went out and thousands of light-up toys illuminated the crowd while the ringmaster welcomed the audience on behalf of John Ringling North. Now, decades later, those fleeting memories continue to bring him goosebumps.



3 RING King Bros. CIRCUS

P. O. BOX 1570, WINTER PARK, FLORIDA 32789

ROUTE CARD No.

SEASON 19 8 71

June

15th. WEEK

Mon.	7	Bristol, Pa.	50
Tue.	8	Barnsboro, N.J.	55
Wed.	9	Toms River, N.J.	70
Thu.	10	Metuchen, N.J.	55
Fri.	11	Wayne, N.J.	45
Sat.	12	Somerville, N.J.	50
Sun.	13	Madison, N.J.	30

16th. WEEK

Mon.	14	Morristown, N.J.	10
Tue.	15	Ramsey, N.J.	45
Wed.	16	Sparta, N.J.	50
Thu.	17	Port Richmond	
Fri.	18	Staten Island, N.Y.	55
		" "	
Sat.	19	Huntington, L.I. N.Y.	60
Sun.	20	" " "	
			4,501

TOTAL MILEAGE

On June 17, 1971, a 16-year-old resident of Staten Island rode his bicycle to the King Bros. lot seeking a job with the circus. With his parents' permission, he joined the show later that day.

Circus World Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society

The Journey Begins

For the 16 years of Stephen's life, he had only seen *The Greatest Show on Earth,* and the grandeur of the circus had made a lasting impression. He knew in his heart he had to become a part of it.

He arrived on the lot in the dark around 4:30 A.M., eager to see the circus come to life. He was on a mission to figure out who he could ask for a job, all the while "petrified" that he would be kicked off the lot. There he sat and waited for what seemed like an eternity. Around 8:00 A.M., the lot began to stir and come to life. During this time a familiar face had shown up – Herb Clement[1], the local zookeeper arrived with his camera and recognized Stephen. They both soon learned that they would not see a tent rise that day. King Bros. was switching tents on that two-day-stand and "they just threw the old tent over the wall" and played to the open-air grandstands. The starstruck teenager finally met and pursued show manager Harry Rawls[2] to hire him. Rawls said: "Well, I tell you what kid, if you get permission from your parents, you can come."

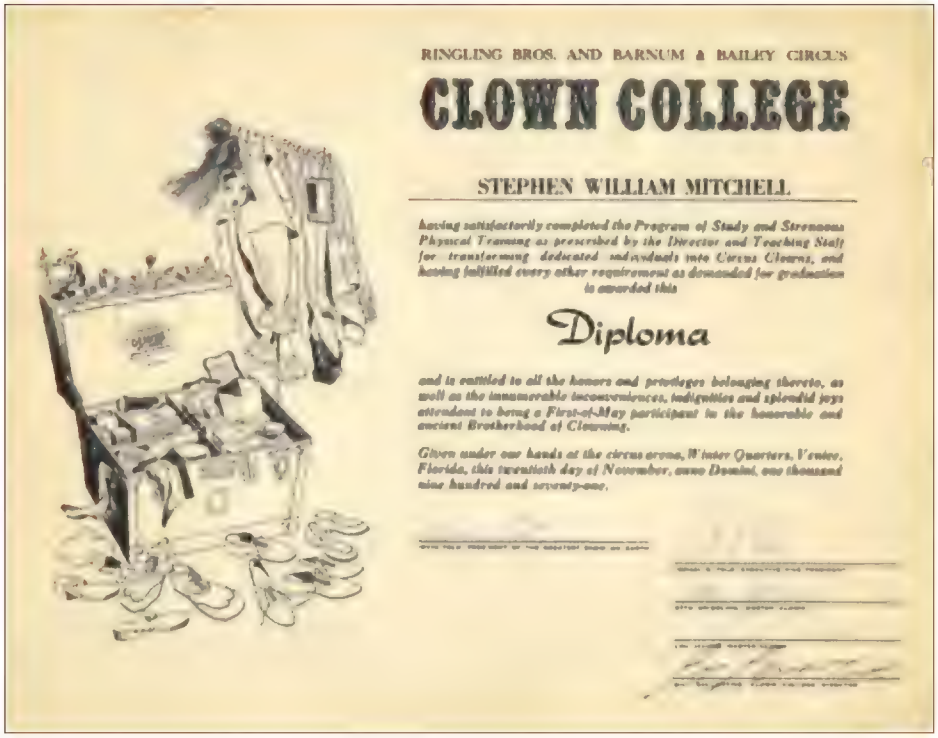
Stephen raced home on his Stingray, ran upstairs, and started packing his sleeping bag, underwear and socks in his brown paper bag. When he ran back downstairs, his dad asked where he was going. Stephen responded, "I just joined the circus, and I gotta go, but I need a note from you and mom so I can go." This was not a new idea for his parents to hear, as Stephen often talked about joining the circus.

When his mother protested, and was beside herself at the idea, his father just said, "Let him go, he'll be back in a week." His parents agreed to take him back to the lot, but it seemed that everything was against his joining the circus. When Stephen's father tried to start the car, the battery was dead. Finally, a neighbor lent them a car battery and the Mitchells arrived in time for Stephen to show his family his bunk in the sleeper trailer before the matinee began. In the sleeper was also where the ponies and camels were housed – not the nicest of accommodations. A short time later, Stephen was wearing a red jumpsuit, being bossed around by "Whitey," the lone prop guy. It was not the glamorous start into the circus that Stephen had dreamed of, but he was there. The next morning, he woke up and was "with the circus!"

As the days and weeks went by, Stephen's role became bigger and bigger – already bored with his props position, he helped in any way he could with the other performers. He became friendly with Antar and Beverly (Duke) Wazzon and their children who were a bit younger than Stephen. He began "hanging out" while they juggled, tumbled and practiced the rolling globes, and he learned those skills, too. Antar became a mentor for Stephen. Whether he was helping unload a leopard or helping put the tent up, Stephen was always willing and eager to expand his circus skill set. He was paid $36 a week, but half of that was held back until the end of the season. His wages included "warm Kool-Aid and three bologna sandwiches a day, but it was fabulous!"

Toward the end of the season, Bill Ballantine[3] came to visit King Bros. and especially the Wazzons. Knowing Stephen needed a brighter prospect than his current position, Antar suggested that Ballentine take Stephen with him back to Clown College. Ballentine encouraged the 16-year-old to fill out an application. That fall, Stephen did not go back to high school and instead poured his heart into going to Clown College, doubtful that he would get accepted. However, soon after submitting the application, he received word that he had been accepted into the 3rd class of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College.

The Hoxie Bros. performance included Ajax the Clown in 1973.



RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS

CLOWN COLLEGE

STEPHEN WILLIAM MITCHELL

having satisfactorily completed the Program of Study and Strenuous Physical Training as prescribed by the Director and Teaching Staff for transforming dedicated individuals into Circus Clowns, and having fulfilled every other requirement as demanded for graduation is awarded this

Diploma

and is entitled to all the honors and privileges belonging thereto, as well as the innumerable inconveniences, indignities and splendid joys attendant to being a First-of-May participant in the honorable and ancient Brotherhood of Clowning.

Given under our hands at the circus arena, Winter Quarters, Venice, Florida, this twentieth day of November, anno Domini, one thousand nine hundred and seventy-one.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College diploma signed by Irvin Feld and Israel Feld, as well as Otto Griebling, Lou Jacobs and Bill Ballentine, presented to Stephen William Mitchell, aka Lee Stevens on November 20, 1971.

Still only 16 years old, Stephen was the youngest of 50 students in the 1971 class. Stephen went through the nine-week training while living in the Venice Villas, right on the beach. In the end, he was not one who was offered a contract to join *The Greatest Show on Earth.* He had not understood that if you did not receive a contract the evening of graduation, that it was over. The self-described young, naive, innocent teenager lost out to more worldly, mature adults. Stephen was so devastated that his mom came down to Florida to bring him home.

During the next couple of years, Stephen worked as a clown at birthday parties and VFW events, but never lost sight of his circus dream. He continued to practice juggling and taught himself how to ride unicycle, trying to expand on his skill set, but unsure how to develop

There were many things in Lee's career that he hoped would happen, but they did not. Those disappointments made him stronger and strive to be better. He is seen here performing on Bill Brickle's Wonderland Circus in 1977.

an act. In the summer of 1972, Bill Ballentine wrote to Stephen to tell him that the new Reid Bros. Circus was hiring. Soon after Stephen was hired, Betty Reid asked him over the phone what his clown stage name was. Stephen did not have one, but there on the kitchen sink a box caught his eye, and suddenly Ajax the Clown was born.

Stephen joined up in Idaho with Reid Bros. He thought it would be a long-lasting opportunity, but the show closed after ten weeks. Shortly thereafter, the 17-year-old found himself stranded in North Hollywood, California. Life varied between meeting celebrities and working at a gas station – but he was always hoping to find a way to get back to the circus. Even then he would say, "I'm going to be in Madison Square Garden someday. I don't know why, but I'm going to." Disheveled and discouraged, Stephen returned to New York. Soon he was out on the road again, working Shrine dates here and there, before landing a job on Hoxie Bros. Circus. On his 18th birthday he arrived at a dairy farm outside of Miami where the show wintered, and became the third clown on the show. After the season ended with Hoxie, Ajax the Clown joined Stu Miller's school show. As his acts developed, so did his drinking problem.

When Stu Miller's show laid off, Stephen worked clubs around New York City, performing single trapeze, rolla bolla, juggling and fire eating. There were blurry, crazy nights. Then when he was 21, the young circus performer became sober just when his career was about to take off.

Stephen was kept busy on the Stu Miller show. He clowned during come-in, performed his rolla bolla act, was levitated as a princess, and returned in clown make-up for finale – in addition to maintaining the Millers' wardrobe.

Stephen wanted to be introduced as "Le Stefan" for his rolla bolla act, but one day Miller instead tauntingly introduced him: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Lee Stevens!" Rather than making Stephen angry at the intended mispronunciation, Stephen decided he liked the name and would keep it. From then on, he would go by his new name, on and off the stage.

Cavalcade of Poodles

Lee had an idea for a dog act, and he knew exactly what he wanted it to portray. He also knew what he absolutely did not want it to be. He was inspired by the likes of Anden's Poodles which performed in clubs in New York as well as on Clyde Bros. Circus. All of Anden's canines were immaculately groomed. Lee wanted people to look at his dogs the way Anden's poodles were admired. He saw other acts that performed with poorly groomed dogs and he started thinking, "Even if my dogs don't do the best tricks in the world, they're going to be the best looking." And that's what he did.

In his off-time, Lee often worked for a groomer in New York that owned show poodles. Some of the poodles that fell short of becoming show dogs were offered to Lee, and he paid for them by working in the shop. Before long, he had acquired his first six poodles. However, even before he got his first dog, he already had three sets of wardrobe made. He had a vision and a goal; it was just a matter of getting enough money to make it happen.

The Stu Miller show wintered at Girsh and Edith "Shrimp" Johnson's 100-acre farm in Kentland, Indiana – they being the first circus fans that Lee became close to. Later Lee returned by himself to the farm with his first group of poodles. They had names like Mai Tai, Kahlua, Cognac and Grand Marnier – each named after a different liquor. Shrimp was a poodle groomer and taught Lee the trade while Girsh helped get his first set of dog props welded out of scrap materials. Starting with 30 dogs, Lee polished the act and reduced the number to twelve. He added smoke machines and mirror balls, and eventually the Lee Stevens Champagne Poodles

Lee Stevens Champagne Poodles performed with Carson & Barnes Circus in 1980. Lee regularly wore all-white costumes. If his dogs jumped on him, they would often get his wardrobe dirty. One time a fellow performer asked if he had "rainy day" wardrobe. Lee said he did not, but that no matter how bad the weather was he always worked hard to keep his costumes and poodles looking immaculate.

act materialized.

One day, Shrimp said they were going to Kankakee, Illinois to see the Carson & Barnes Circus, and Lee tagged along with his dogs in his box truck. On the lot, Lee let the immaculately-groomed dogs out, and standing nearby, Ted Bowman[4] asked Shrimp who the person was with all the beautiful poodles. Shrimp told Bowman he was Lee Stevens and he was there looking for a job. After a quick conversation with Dorey "D. R." Miller, Lee was back on the Johnson's farm, excitement building as he hooked up his house trailer, about to join the five-ring extravaganza.

Lee Stevens Champagne Poodles performed on Carson & Barnes Circus until the end of the 1980 season. While he was there, Laura Herriott taught Lee the cloud swing. Soon after the season ended, Lee joined the Bill Brickle's Wonderland Circus and had his first opportunity to perform the cloud swing in addition to his dog act.

Playing one-day stands in the early 1980s was a "nightmare" – not so much the monotonous performing schedule – but setting up the aerial rigging in the school gymnasiums. To achieve this, Lee had to stack two tables on top of each other, and then place an extension ladder on top of the tables in order to reach the ceiling beams – considerably more dangerous than performing the act itself. Once, Lee had mistakenly rigged the pull rope wrong and without the help of an assistant, had to pump himself in order to swing. Exhausted, he wrapped his ankles too high and did the final dive, catching his tights on the cloud swing and pulling his tights down to his ankles. The school erupted in laughter as he hung there, upside down with his backside exposed to the audience. Lee couldn't help but laugh hysterically at himself and was so exhausted that they had to bring in a ladder to get him down.

Lee's cloud swing days were soon over, leaving more energy to focus on the Lee Stevens Champagne Poodles and his rolla bolla act while he worked on Circus Odyssey, Royal Hanneford Circus, International All-Star Circus, Tarzan Zerbini Circus, Circo Atayde and Garden Bros. Circus.

In 1981, Lee had intentions of expanding his acts by purchasing two leopards. He went to buy them from Riverview, Florida resident Ken Fess who, in addition to being in the buying/selling business of exotic cats, bred Marmoset

The Champagne Poodles were photographed on the International All-Star Circus in 1981. Left to right, each named after a liquor, are Crème de "Coco", Tanqueray, Brandy, Galliano (on motorcycle), Grand Marnier, Mai Tai, Anisette, Kahlua (black poodle barely visible sitting behind Lee's arm) and Chablis.

monkeys for university laboratory studies. He convinced Lee to instead buy a couple of baby Hamadryas baboons. Lee had seen Carmen Hall's all-male baboon act, but he was not sure if working with primates was for him. However, he finally decided to buy them for $1,000 each, a price he later considered to be an outrageous amount of money.

Baby Baboons

A short time later, Lee went to the Atlanta airport to pick up a little wooden crate that held the beginnings of one of the most important chapters of his life. It was Easter weekend, and Lee went to J. C. Penney and bought two little Easter outfits for the baby baboons. It took about three hours to dress them, although the clothes stayed on all of 30 seconds – just enough for a photo. Lee named the two female baboons Zsa Zsa and Eva, after the Gabor sisters. Later, while laying off again at the Johnson's farm, he trained the babies and created an act. Lee went back to the International All-Star Circus with the poodle act and debuted the baboon act in 1982.

For a while he lived the rigorous life of one-day-stand school shows. Lee stayed overnight in school parking lots and plugged in through a locked but cracked open door, able to pull the plug before the kids started arriving in the morning. He groomed his poodles and baboons for each stand, using the school's showers to do so. He caravaned with horse trainer, Gaylord Maynard, which made life somewhat easier during those never-ending days.

Once in 1983 while playing a spot-date for Sam T. Polack Circus, there was a bidding war of sorts for the new and upcoming Lee Stevens Champagne Poodles. In the audience were Tarzan Zerbini, Tommy Hanneford, Ian Garden and Sam Polack. After speaking with the other circus owners, who didn't have a spot for a dog act at the time, Lee met with Tommy Hanneford. Gaylord had already advised Lee, telling him if Tommy tried to negotiate a lower amount, not to accept less than $500/$600 per day – which was three times Lee's current salary. Tommy quickly rattled off the upcoming dates of the season and asked what it would take to bring Lee onto the show. Lee answered that it would be $600 per day. Tommy absolutely refused and paced around, saying there was no way he could pay that. Lee told him the other producers wanted his poodle act and "were willing to pay," and then he finally came down to $500 a day. After a bit more pacing, Tommy finally said that they had a deal. He already had a contract made out, and he filled in the agreed upon price before they signed it. Lee had not realized that the Houston date alone was eleven days. Finally, the kid from Staten Island was making the kind of money he had dreamed of. The poodle act joined a spectacle with Hugo Zacchini opening the show, the Wynn's motorcycle aerial act, and the Tangier tumbling troupe from Morocco.

"I met my wife on the back of a horse."[5]

Judy Snider was the daughter of Dr. James and Janice Snider. Her father was a general surgeon on a missionary trip in Ghana, when Judy was born on December 22, 1963. About three years later, the family moved back to Canada and settled in Cambridge, Ontario. Her parents bought a farm around the block from the African Lion Safari and Judy grew up around horses; riding, training and teaching. When she was 15-years old, she was riding her horses around the park and by happenstance met and became friends with the wife of the owner. This led to Judy getting "the coolest job ever" – flying birds of prey in the park, which she did for a few years.

Judy Snider was 15 when she started working with birds of prey at African Lion Safari. She is seen here in 1983 training a young prairie falcon, getting it used to being handled and eating from her gloved hand.

After her first year at the university, Judy was contracted to perform the Birds of Prey show at the Parc Safari, outside of Montreal. Judy left home for the first time, narrating the show in French. At Parc Safari there was also a circus, and

through a mutual love of horses, Judy began a friendship there with Pam and Roger Zoppe. Later when Pam had to leave for a family emergency, Judy filled in with the riding act, which was easy for her given she was an experienced Three-Day Eventer.[6]

Judy fell in love with performing and the whole idea of the circus. When the season ended, she could not make herself go back to the university; she just had no interest. She continued caring for the animals and birds through the winter at the African Lion Safari. Later, the Zoppes convinced her to go on the road with them, essentially as their groom, taking care of the horses and chimpanzees, and later she became a regular performer in the riding act.

At that point in time, Lee was touring his poodle act and five-monkey baboon act with Garden Bros. Circus. He was part of a group of performers that was laying over at the African Lion Safari, waiting for the tour to resume, while combating the cold Canadian winter. Lee was standing in his white fur coat with Johnny Welde when he saw Judy walking towards them, across a field of deep snow, clad in camouflage. Lee said, "You know someday I'm gonna marry a girl just like that, it may even be her." He "never thought in a million years it actually would be her." Judy's thoughts were quite different: "I said to myself, what is this [expletive deleted] doing tromping through the mud and elephant crap in his white boots and white fox fur coat?" However, not long after, she "fell dead and madly in love with him."

Judy holds a chimpanzee named Newton on her shoulders at the top of a pyramid in the Roger Zoppe riding act. The equestrians supporting her are Zoppe and Wayne Rosaire.

Lee was back at his parent's house in Staten Island laying off when he received a call from Roger Zoppe asking if he could come help with the riding act. Lee had offered to help if they were ever short. Considering that he was just waiting for dates to resume in Canada, Lee jumped in his truck with his animals and drove through a blizzard on Easter Sunday to Erie, Pennsylvania. After a difficult trip, he arrived to find no one home. He struggled to keep himself and his animals warm until his friends returned from Easter dinner.

The next day the snowstorm continued, but the troupe rode the horses about four miles to a practice barn while semi trucks spit slush up onto the horses and their riders. Lee was starting to think he should have stayed in the comfort of his parents' warm home. Finally, they arrived at the barn, which had holes in the roof, providing no protection from the snow blowing in. Little did Lee's companions know that he had never in his life been on a horse. After getting the horses and everyone situated, Roger told Lee that he needed him to do a fork jump. Lee said, "How many?" and asked Roger to show him – just so he was sure how the Italians liked them to be done. Roger had the horse gallop around the ring and did a fork jump, and then another at Lee's request. It was snowing, creaking, and the wind was howling throughout the barn. Lee was all bundled up and started to shed the layers of clothing he had on, right down to a pair of tights and a black leotard. Roger was exasperated, "What the hell are you doing?" and Lee said, "I never did this before, I wasn't sure what to wear!" Roger said, "You never did this before?" and Lee answered, "Nope, but I'm all you got so you better show me what you need me to do, because three days from now we're going to be working with Ian up in Canada." At the first couple attempts at a fork jump, Lee jumped so high he flew right over the horse, so Judy stood on the outside of the ring curb and pulled Lee's feet down so he would land on the horse.

There were five people on the horse, with Roger on top of their shoulders. A big chimpanzee, named Kenya, was in the group as well, and "was in love with Judy," so every time they all met on the horse, the chimp would try to attack Lee, and bite at his hands. "That was kind of fun and it went on for several weeks. And that's how we met, on the back of a horse."

In May, after only a few weeks of dating, 21-year-old Judy, Lee told her, "Either come with me, or I'll never see you again." Judy was aimed to follow in her father's footsteps and go to med school, but she left her life as a university student to follow "a vagabond circus performer with his monkeys and dogs and live an exciting life." They left

The wedding of Stephen Mitchell and Judy Snider took place under the Circus World Museum big top in Baraboo, July 30, 1985. Buckles Woodcock served as the best man and his wife Barbara (partly seen over the minister's shoulder) was Judy's maid of honor.

the baboons in the U.S. for a couple of months and performed on the B-circuit in Canada with the dog act. The first time Judy ever worked in the act, she didn't know the names of any of the dogs. She wore a white satin gown and borrowed high heels. She ran into the ring and her heel broke. Later on, when she finally joined in the baboon act, she stood far away, back by the ring curb.

Just two months after she had left her home terrain, they were passing through Wisconsin with some time off and they stopped by Circus World Museum. Lee told Barbara Woodcock that he had asked his girlfriend to marry him and Barbara asked what her response was. Lee wanted to be sure and decided to ask Judy again – that was Saturday and they got married on Tuesday – the same day that Lee "almost got arrested."

That weekend, Lee and Judy raced to finish certain tasks before the wedding, including buying rings and finding a minister who would marry them. While rushing around, Lee dodged police requests to move his illegally parked trailer. Then on the day of the wedding, Lee had a visit from a detective and had to explain that he was getting married that afternoon and promised that after they tied the knot, he would be on his way. The wedding took place in the tent, between shows on July 30, 1985.

Sea Lion Escapades

That winter the newlyweds entered a new chapter together – one that included sea lions. Since no sea lion acts existed in North America at the time, Lee thought it could be an opportunity to have a sought-after, unique act. He was encouraged by Ian Garden to buy a couple of sea lions and Ian provided the loan to purchase them and develop the act. Toward the end of 1985, Lee and Judy received a letter stating that they were approved to have the animals. They hired well-known trainer, Melvin "Fuzzy" Plunkett[7] to train the act and Lee met him for the first time at the San Diego airport. Upon their meeting, Fuzzy asked Lee, "What the hell made you want to get into the seal business?" Lee replied, "Luck, just luck and the fact that it hasn't been done in a while." Fuzzy then replied, "Well, you're gonna find out why." They drove to Sea World where Fuzzy picked out two of the most promising-looking of the beached and stranded sea lions.

In January 1986, Lee Stevens and Fuzzy Plunkett worked together to train two sea lion pups in Stedman, North Carolina. The sea lions, Genevieve and Janice, were named after Lee and Judy's mothers.

Lee made a donation and promptly became the owner of two sea lions, both less than two-years old. They were named Genevieve and Janice, after Lee and Judy's mothers.

In two extra-large dog crates it took 22 hours, seven flights and 100 miles in a van to get them back to Fayetteville, North Carolina. In each airport, they fed the sea lions fish and sprayed them down. Their "barking" echoed through the terminals and people ran to see what was making the noise.

Situated in the middle of a cornfield, Lee and Judy made their home while Fuzzy helped them train the sea lions. They befriended a Vietnam veteran who built a pool for the sea lions, and they purchased a gutted mobile home that was used for practice space for the sea lions. It was a hard winter. Judy was pregnant with their first child, and Fuzzy slept on the couch of their trailer.

It was bittersweet when after ten years, the Lee Stevens Champagne Poodles finished its final performance. It had become too much to keep the dogs and add the sea lions to the troupe which already included five baboons. They gave the poodles to someone who eventually broke the act down into three separate acts.

In early 1986, the Stevens left to rejoin Ian Garden's show with a contract for two acts, working the two sea lions and five baboons. In July between dates, their first son, Alexander, was born.

During the second year with Ian, while still in Canada, they acquired a third sea lion and named him Scooter. They brought Fuzzy Plunkett back to train him and within only four weeks he was walking on his hind flippers and doing front flipper stands in addition to learning to walk on a ball. In the end, they decided to give him to MarineLand in Niagara Falls, Canada, because they were afraid to bring him into the states without the correct paperwork. Scooter never performed in the act.

In January of their second year of marriage, Lee and Judy were staying at Kay Rosaire's property in Sarasota, while they looked for a house to buy. At the same time, Lee served on a committee with Kay for a black-tie dinner fundraiser at Showfolks to raise money for the Sarasota parade. Lee went to the Sarasota zoning commission to see where he could find property to house the sea lions. The zoning commissioner heard Lee was there and came out to speak with him. He told Lee that he absolutely would not have sea lions residing in Sarasota County as long as he was commissioner.

Lee and Judy's baboons and sea lions were among a handful of acts that performed at the gala fundraiser at Showfolks. At the event, Don Phillips told Lee that April Fossett was selling her property in Gibsonton, and told him to forget Sarasota and move north. That was Saturday evening. On Sunday Lee and Judy looked at the property, and Monday they bought it. That same week they moved into their new home.

Janice balances a ball on a stick in Garden Bros. Circus, 1987. Lee remembers Garden Bros. as a fabulous and beautiful show, and Ian Garden Sr. as an outstanding ringmaster who watched each act work, led by example and made performers want to be their very best. Lee said, "We were better when we worked with Ian. He brought me up to the level of where I needed to be in order to accomplish my dream of going to Ringling."

During their third year with the sea lions, while on Hamid-Morton Circus, Lee was driving the box truck while Judy sat in the passenger seat, holding and feeding Alexander. The box truck held the animals and pulled their house trailer. It was miserably cold, late in the day near Ottawa, Kansas. They were enroute from Oklahoma City to St. Paul. Suddenly the truck hit a patch of black ice and the trailer jackknifed, separating the truck from the trailer. The house trailer rolled down an embankment and the truck flipped over on the interstate, the top of the cab shearing off and shattering the box on the truck. Inside the upside-down truck, Judy was unconscious, holding Alexander, the sea lions had been

thrown into the snowy ditch near a barbed-wire fence, gas was running down beside the catalytic heater powered by propane, and there were big flames. And they had no idea where the baboons were.

A couple driving past had seen the accident. They ran over and took the crying baby from Judy and then helped her and Lee out of the truck.

Lee and Judy discovered that when the truck flipped over, all the baboon cages detached from the side of the wall, fell into the pool and the pool turned upside down. In the middle of I-35, there were frozen fish all over the road around a big fiberglass pool, with six baboons underneath it.

Publicity photo for the Lee Stevens Sea Lions, 1987.

As if by fate, right across the interstate, was a new animal shelter. Animal control arrived and put the sea lions in the dog catcher truck and put water on them. The baboons were fine, they put leashes and collars on them and put them in dog crates. Judy went with animal control and at the animal shelter they plugged the bottom of the ceramic dog stalls so that the sea lions could slosh around. The shelter fortunately had large stainless steel bird cages, that they put the baboons in.

Judy took the first three monkeys in with leashes and collars, and put them inside the bird cages. She then looked up and saw the two monkeys with their faces pressed against the window on the outside! They had just reached out and opened up the dog crates and were now loose. The exhausted young mother was at the end of a horrific day, and as if the situation wasn't bad enough already, she was staring at two baboons on the wrong side of the glass, about to run around Ottawa, Kansas.

Lee and Judy did not know what they were going to do. They contacted friends from the show, and Roy Wells stopped and he took care of the baby. They went to the junkyard to salvage what they could from the wreck. The truck had been completely destroyed, so they rented a U-Haul without telling the rental manager why they needed the truck. Patio furniture was Duct taped to the top of the temporary cages so the animals could not escape and 2″ x 4″ lumber was used to fix the side of the trailer that had been severely damaged. As evening became night, they put everything they owned in the trailer and hooked up to the U-Haul.

They arrived in St. Paul just before sunrise and a large number of people from the show were there waiting for them. Someone had gone and found a swimming pool at Sears in the dead of winter, allowing the sea lions a place to be while the baboons temporarily stayed in the U-Haul. Lee performed the 10:00 A.M. school show while Judy took Alexander to the hospital due to a serious head injury.

The good Samaritans that had helped them had driven to St Paul to see the evening performance. The ringmaster got word that the couple wanted to see Lee, Judy and Alexander after the show. In the middle of the baboon act, the ringmaster stopped the music and started talking to the audience. He announced that these people who had come to the rescue, had just gone through a terrible tragedy themselves – they had been on their way home from the funeral for their two-year-old grandson. They had been in the right place at the right time to witness the terrible accident and to have been given the opportunity to help Lee and Judy. When they put the spotlight on the couple in the audience, Lee stood in the ring and "started crying like a baby".

"Every day is another story."

After the accident, John Cuneo offered space on his property near Chicago to stay as long as needed. While they had a new pool built, the sea lions lived in a swimming pool in the middle of a wild animal arena set up in Cuneo's elephant barn. After rebuilding everything, Lee and Judy completed another season with Ian Garden in addition to another 16 weeks at the Parc Safari.

While performing at Parc Safari, John Cuneo informed Lee that Kenneth Feld would be calling him. Soon after, Lee received a call from June Forsyth, Kenneth Feld's assistant, asking Lee to hold for Mr. Feld. A moment later, Kenneth was on the phone, but Lee cut him off, convinced that it was one of this friends playing a prank on him. He hung up on "Mr. Feld". A moment later, the call was repeated, with Forsyth again transferring the call to "Mr. Feld." Lee blew up at the supposed impostor, vowing to get even with whoever it was. Then, a third time, Lee answered the call, but Kenneth

Feld himself was on the phone. Lee recalls that he said, "Lee, if you hang up again, you're going to blow your chance to come on the show. Do you want to come on the show, or don't you? Now listen to me before you talk." Lee was speechless. Soon after, a contract was signed by both parties for Disneyland in Japan.

About a week after returning home from Canada, Judy was distraught when she discovered that Genevieve, the sea lion named after Lee's mother, had died. A necropsy revealed that she had a rare form of cancer, similar to feline leukemia, at just a few years old.

Down to only one sea lion, Lee knew that the act would not be what Kenneth was expecting for his Gold Show in Japan. He called Kenneth and apologized, but told him he could not come to Japan because they no longer had the act he had booked because one of the animals had died. Lee said Kenneth told him to do what he could and not act hastily.

Lee learned that Busch Gardens had a sea lion that he would be allowed to train and use. Every day, he drove up to Tampa to work with a trainer to prepare the little pup. The sea lion soon was able to balance a ball, which would be enough to put her in the act to begin with – the other sea lion would do the majority of the tricks. Things were coming together. Then one day, Lee arrived at one of their training sessions and was shocked to learn that the young sea lion had been shipped to another facility, unbeknownst to him.

This promotional photo for the Ringling Gold Unit was taken of Lee and Judy posing with their most docile baboon, Jolie, in the winter of 1988. They fed their baboons a diet of Purina monkey chow high in protein and vitamins, and they gave them lots of juice and water. On a daily basis their baboons also received apples, oranges, bananas, peaches, lettuce, onions and garlic. In Japan apples were somewhat of a delicacy – big and beautiful, wrapped with ribbon and bows – they cost about $11 each.

Lee once again called Kenneth and explained that he had too much integrity to show up with an incomplete act. Lee said that Kenneth was amazed at his honesty and told him that most people would not act in this fashion. Lee told him, "I've waited all my life. All my life I've waited to work there, to be part of *The Greatest Show on Earth*, and I'm not going to jeopardize it…I'm not coming with what I've got." Lee said that Kenneth promised him that one day he would be with *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

Lee was devastated and truly depressed, feeling as though his chance to go on Ringling was gone forever. Until three weeks later when Kenneth Feld called back with an offer to go to Japan with just the baboon act. They signed a contract for the following year in Japan, for the 1989 date.

The remaining sea lion, Janice, was given to an aquari-

um in Gulfport, Mississippi. Soon after her arrival, Lee received a call from the park, saying they would need to put her in an enclosed area. She had been the ladder climber in the act and they discovered that at night she would climb over the fence. On more than one occasion, the employees arrived at work in the morning to find her out in the parking lot.

In the spring of 1988, Lee had received a call from a French-Canadian representing the big supermarket chain, Kobiego, who asked Lee to consider producing a circus that would be used to promote the supermarkets. Lee's long-term friend Jim Nordmark had recently closed his show and offered all of his equipment for free, therefore, Lee had all the elements needed to produce a beautiful show. In a short period of time, Lee produced Cirque du Bonheurre which boasted an eight-piece band. They got an up-and-coming 10-year-old Quebecois star to announce the show. While in production, Lee and Judy's second son, Sebastian, was born.

Later in 1988, Ian Garden took the first circus in 27 years to the island of Bermuda. Many Bermudan Jaycees came to Tampa to help transport the show to the island. It was a spectacular show, presented in a large Harold Barnes tent. Accommodations were in old British army barracks located on a cliff overlooking the North Atlantic, accompanied by a chef that cooked three meals a day. According to Lee and Judy, everyone on the show had the time of their life, until the trip home.

Talulah Bankhead, one of the baby baboons acquired in Japan, sits comfortably on Judy's shoulder at the beginning of the 1990 Blue Unit tour. Judy truly enjoyed training the baby monkeys and loved the time it took to figure out how each individual animal thought. Fuzzy Plunkett suggested that Judy create situations where the animals would do exactly what you wanted them to do. She said, "I loved that give and take when you're training."

There was no help to load on their return trip and the performers flew home in an old cargo aircraft from the WWII era, piled in with their animals. Landing in Tampa, they were met by emergency vehicles and men with rifles who ordered the pilots to "cease and desist." The performers learned that the flight had flown with no paperwork. Customs officials were likely surprised to find lions and baboons on the flight. While everyone was scared to death, Lee took charge and explained that they were circus people who had just performed in Bermuda. Ian Garden did not know what his performers were going through, until later.

"If those baboons could talk"

In 1989, Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey returned to Japan for a second year with the Gold show, this time only going to two cities over the course of eight months.

In Osaka, the Gold Unit was set up outdoors, in part of a park in which Siegfried and Roy performed at the other end opposite of the mammoth circus tent, while other world-renowned artists performed within the park as well. There had been a lot of flooding and boardwalks were set up around

the compound for the performers, including a patio where many performers ate together almost every night after the shows. The show performed six days a week. In Tokyo, the show set up in the area near the Shimbashi train station, a national historic site and Japan's first railway.

Lee and Judy went to Japan with six baboons and came back with 16. Lee had heard about a prominent animal dealer, located in the outskirts of Osaka. He arrived to find a mansion filled floor to ceiling with cages holding all different kinds of animals, an unbelievable sight. Lee wanted to purchase just one baboon, but the dealer would only sell him a "whole shipment." Ten wild, dirty, not very well cared for baboons went with Lee back to the show. Judy was bound and determined to bathe them one at a time in the house trailer – a remarkable feat in itself.

Most of the baboons they had purchased were under two years of age. Only Phyllis was too old to train and was sent to a breeding colony in South Carolina. Others were given away, and one that had been weaned too young died.

More than a year later, the remaining new baboons were integrated into the act. At times Lee and Judy tried to incorporate some of the babies into the act by sitting them on the ends of the pyramid, bringing the total up to twelve baboons. Finally, they kept the nine strongest in the ring, and this was thought to be the largest primate act in the world at the time.

Once the show in Tokyo was over, most of the performers left, including Judy with her two young boys. However. the animal acts and trainers were left waiting for a flight out. Every day they waited to find out if they were going to fly out and/or if there would be challenges with customs releasing the animals to fly back to the states. Over two weeks after the show closed, Lee and his baboons were the first animals to leave Japan. Other trainers along with Dr. Richard Houck, the long-time Ringling veterinarian, stayed behind with the elephants and other animals.

Lee was apprehensive when he, his baboons and belongings were loaded into the back of a government truck with a tarp over the back. At the airport, everything was hurriedly put onto a cargo 747. As the only passenger, Lee sat in one of four big recliners that were bolted to the floor while the pilot and co-pilot smoked big cigars. A short while into the flight, the co-pilot informed Lee that they were going to fly through a typhoon. The co-pilot guided Lee to a wall with a flip-down cot and strapped him down. From his position Lee could still see his animals down in the deck below. The plane and its souls aboard endured the storm for a few hours, terrified at times. After they made it through the storm, Lee was unstrapped and given a cigar and some food by the co-pilot.

The plane landed in Alaska to refuel and then flew on to New York, although Lee had thought he and his animals were flying directly to Florida. After already traveling about 20 hours, the plane landed and Lee, his animals and belongings were loaded into a semi truck. A day later they were

Three-year-old Alexander Mitchell rode in the motorcycle sidecar with his baboon buddy during the 120th edition of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. The Stevens family was featured during the 1990 Blue Unit "Togni tour."

dropped off on the street in front of his house in Gibsonton. Lee got home two and a half weeks after Judy had left Japan with the kids.

The Stevens had an all-female Hamadryas baboon act, which consisted of the original five that were eight to ten years older than the new babies from Japan. The original five were Lee's "girls" and Judy had to be careful how she interacted with them, although with the new babies, she could do almost anything. The "babies" tolerated Lee, but they loved Judy. Lee was the leader all and all, but the baboons would sometimes go to Judy for safety. On two occasions the baboons attacked her and sent her to the hospital.

Lee and Judy understood that in order to train baboons, it was necessary to understand the hierarchy and how they functioned socially within their group. If not, it would have been virtually impossible to work with them. Lee always maintained their social structure by allowing them to be together. In the wild, baboons are an extremely aggressive and exist in highly organized groups; this does not change when they are in captivity. Lee and Judy had a big outdoor cage where the baboons could all be together, acting out their natural behaviors: playing, grooming, adhering to their hierarchy. That hierarchy was preserved in the act by the order in which they sat, and each animal knew where their place was.

Normally you will not see a second person in the ring of a baboon act, because there is always only one leader. However, Judy figured out how to be that second leader, which was unheard of. She found it ironic when people expected animals to understand how humans think, "You have to train them by understanding how their minds work, and then adapt your training methods to them."

Over the course of time, Lee and Judy also had Savannah baboons, Olive baboons and couple of Mandrills. These animals were trained, but never put in the act because their instinctive behaviors were too strong to mix with the Hamadryas baboons.

When they wanted to introduce a new baboon into the act, it took about a year of training and integrating. It was fairly easy to figure out the animal's personality and natural behaviors, and to learn how they were going to work with the others. The hard part was getting the other baboons to be okay with the new girl. They had to be extremely careful, and it took time.

Lee and Judy Stevens first presented their all-female baboon act at Circus World Museum in 1992. Lee compares himself to a chameleon: "Whatever act I'm doing…I take on a new persona. I enjoyed that because I went from this Liberace-looking fluffy dog act and then I was running around with a loincloth and a bunch of monkeys. I got to be another person."

Lee had an affinity with the troupe's alpha female, Zsa Zsa, which he described as a very special animal who trusted him. She did all the television shows with Lee, and he took her everywhere. With Zsa Zsa, as well as the rest of the first group of baboons, Judy had to be particularly careful because they had an established relationship with Lee before she had come into their lives. Judy never told Zsa Zsa what to do; she always asked her to do things.

There was a time when most zoos and roadside parks had baboons. Traditionally, baboons were inexpensive to purchase and compared to chimpanzees, were hardier and physically stronger. However,

At only six or seven years old, Sebastian Mitchell walked next to an Asian elephant during a Ringling animal walk. Years later he had a career working directly with 16 elephants at African Lion Safari in Canada.

most of these attractions did not fully understand how the species behaves in the wild and they put the males and the females together. Males can weigh up to twice as much as females. Due to their instincts being extremely strong, it is impossible to put males and females in an act together because a fight to take control of the harem would likely take place as it does in the wild.

In December of 1989, Lee and Judy joined the Ringling Blue Unit for the rehearsals. The baboon act worked in Ring 1, and their jungle costumes coordinated with Carmen Hall's wardrobe in Ring 3. The two acts paralleled their routines and ended simultaneously. Lee had to run with the baboons on their leashes from the back door, all the way down the track to reach Ring 1. He would start yelling at the back door and would keep yelling all the way down the track, running as fast as he could, allowing the baboons no time to get into mischief. Even on their long leashes, they kept right behind Lee. He ran into the ring, up to the ring curb, turned and let them all go, and they all went straight to their assigned seats.

Kenneth Feld negotiated all of the contracts for the three units that the Stevens were on. Towards the end of the Blue Unit "Togni tour" they spoke about returning a year after the tour ended, in 1993, to join the Red show. Lee had an idea to change the act to a Latin rumba theme, an idea that Kenneth liked. They also spoke about developing a second act with ponies that would be presented by their young sons, Alexander and Sebastian, fitting in perfectly with the planned *Children of the Rainbow* theme.

Greg Parkinson, Executive Director of the Circus World Museum, had seen the baboon act on the Blue Unit and contacted Lee about working a season in Baraboo. Before the season began, Lee and Judy purchased nine ponies and while in Baraboo, they developed a pony act with their two sons, Alexander and Sebastian.

The Stevens enjoyed their time at the Circus World Museum. For them, it was a dream come true to be off the road for four months. They have fond memories of working there, describing it as a great, family environment that provided time to have fun as well as train new acts.

In 1995, while performing at Circus World Museum for a second season, Alexander and Sebastian signed an agreement with Greg Parkinson, to lead two of Dave Hale's camels in the daily circus parade. Without their parents, the boys went into the office of the Executive Director to negotiate for themselves. Greg offered them $45 a week, and Sebastian said, "I will take no less than $25!" The little boys were so proud of their first negotiation.

Alexander and Sebastian had a wonderful childhood growing up in the circus, but they followed the rules, one of which was to stay away from the baboons. Even when Sebastian was only a year old, he would find a way out of the trailer to go the elephants, the animals that he always had a special affinity for.

After high school, Sebastian went to work for the African Lion Safari, the same place where his mother had gotten her start in preforming. It had an outstanding breeding program with veterinarians coming from all over the world to conduct research on the 100-acre facility. He was the youngest person in North American to care for and train elephants from the day they were born.

Once Judy witnessed Sebastian's love for animals and his amazing abilities when he called the elephants back, after leaving them to wander independently on facility's large property. The snowy ground began to shake. Suddenly 16 el-

One of Lee's original baboons, Eva, leaped from one A-frame hurdle to another during Red Unit performances in 1995. Lee and Judy were proud to have performed in one of the last big three-ring animal productions on Ringling-Barnum.

ephants emerged from the trees and came toward them, the baby elephants reaching out to Sebastian with their trunks.

This image was staged at the Ringling winter quarters in Venice at the end of 1992 and was used as a publicity photo for the Children of the Rainbow *Red Unit tour. Left to right: Judy, Sebastian, Lee and Alexander.*

Judy was overwhelmingly proud of her son as she saw how they listened to him and how he had a positive impact on them.

Back to the Big Show

In the Spring of 1993, when the Stevens opened in Madison Square Garden for their third tour on *The Greatest Show on Earth,* Judy watched her husband cry with joy, surrounded by his family performing with him. He had been the driving force of the family, and Judy recalls having had the most incredible feeling knowing Lee had gotten there due to dreaming big along with all of their hard work.

On the *Children of the Rainbow* tour, the baboons were back in Ring 1 and the act synced up with the Lentz' chimpanzees, in the center ring. Both primate acts went up to the front of the ring at the same time for their final bow. The year after Ringling, they worked together again at the big Evansville, Indiana Shrine date.

Judy trained the pony act that included nine ponies and a Great Dane that was bigger than the ponies. Lee designed and constructed seven child-sized dolls that sat on the ponies with matching costumes for Alexander and Sebastian who presented the act with Judy. After the dress rehearsal, they were asked to cut their nine-min-

Judy and her sons Alexander and Sebastian presented their pony act during the 123rd edition of The Greatest Show on Earth.

ute act down to three and a half minutes to mirror the acts in the other two rings. They performed their "fast and zippy" pony act in Ring 3, with Mark Oliver Gebel and Tina Gebel working animals in the other rings.

Judy remembers fondly the comments that Kenneth Feld shared with her as he expressed his happiness when at the dress rehearsal, the pony act was already fully put together.

Judy recalls one time when Gunther Gebel-Williams teased her before they went on and told her that she did not know how to use a whip. She said she didn't need one and threw her whip on the floor backstage. Judy worked three weeks without a whip, just to prove her point.

Lee Stevens: "I enjoyed the bond I had with the animals, especially the first five baboons. They were like little hairy people. That's what we called them. That's really what they are – little hairy people." Children of the Rainbow *tour, 1993-1994.*

The Stevens became very close with the Gebels. Mark Oliver, "Buffy," was like a big brother to Alexander and Sebastian. Often, the boys would ride overland with Gunther in his bus and Sigrid would make them crepes for breakfast. During their years with the Red Unit, Lee developed great respect and fondness for Gunther, who he would call "Pop" and Gunther would call him "Sonny." Lee proudly remembers once when he was washing his hubcaps, and Gunther told him that he respected him because Lee worked for the things he had, he took care of those things, and was proud of them – both in the ring and behind the curtain.

Everyone on the show knew to give Lee space before and after the act. The moment Lee and the baboons came out of the truck, the man/baboon tribe walked as fast as they could, and once they got to the back door, all the baboons were trained to sit down, with Judy there to assist. They always arrived

early, at least an act ahead.

In 1993, during the first summer of the Red Unit tour, while in Los Angeles, an act was out which changed the lighting cues and forced Lee to leave the ring in the dark with the animals at the end of the act. Lee missed his step on the metal ring curb and he fell and flipped over, landing on his back. Almost immediately Lee could not feel his legs. The performance director was yelling at him to run down the track, but he couldn't. By the time he reached the back door, he told Judy to take the baboons, just as he went down and passed out.

The baboons were out of the show, due to Lee's fractured back. Surgery was pending and he would recuperate at his mother's house in Staten Island. They planned for Judy to work both acts, but no one believed she could do it. She rehearsed the act while Kenneth stood watching her from the front of the ring. After that, everyone was aware that Judy knew what she was doing. She worked the acts by herself for five months. She had no choice other than to be responsible for nine ponies, nine baboons, two dogs and two kids. Meanwhile, Lee was a thousand miles away and "going crazy" because he could not be there to support her.

It was not hard for the baboons to get used to Judy working the act, but it was extremely hard on Judy. She possessed a naturally calm demeanor and found it easy to train horses and dogs. However, she had to change her personality to be a force to be reckoned with in order to be the leader of the wild primates and gain their respect. After getting ready for the act, as she walked out of the dressing room to the truck to get the baboons, she had taken on a different persona. And after the act, people got out of her way.

The hardest part for Judy was to bring the original five baboons backstage and wait with them in the back door portal area where there was so much going on. If the baboons thought that she was not fully in control, they might start poking at each other, sometimes escalating into fights.

Once, Judy made a huge mistake that gave her a scar to prove it. In Minneapolis, the area by the back door was very tight and the elephants were set up nearby. The baboons naturally despised the elephants. Something that day frightened them and one acted out and pulled Judy's wig. Judy had a stick and tapped Zsa Zsa on the head, but it was Jolie who had done it. Zsa Zsa sent Jolie after Judy and she bit her badly in the leg, immediately blood gushing moments before they were to go on. Judy took her armband off and put it on her leg to stop the bleeding. "I was so mad. I ran in there… I worked that act, and they [the baboons] knew that I wasn't happy. That was the best they ever behaved. They sat there with their feet down, their hands on the seats...but I had to work. If I hadn't, I never would have worked them again. I didn't have an option." After several months, Lee returned, his bare-chested costumed altered to allow him to hide a back brace.

Lee and Judy's baboons included the first five – the Gabors: Zsa Zsa, Eva, Magda and Jolie, as well as Marlene Dietrick – and the younger ones kept from the group acquired in Japan that were named Joan Crawford, Betty Davis, Vivian Leigh and Shelley Winters.

In 1994, during the second year of the tour, Judy broke her ankle in six places after her heel got caught in the ring rubber, so Lee had to work the ponies for six weeks while Judy recovered.

Baboon loose!

Jolie, one of the original five baboons, was the biggest in size, but she was very gentle and normally would not hurt anyone. She was the only one that had a knack for getting

loose and did so a few times.

Once, while on Ringling, the front row was full of disabled kids who were eating popcorn and cotton candy. Lee ran into the ring with the baboons and he let go of the leashes so they would all run to their seats, but Jolie seized the opportunity and ran over the ring curb, jumping into one of the kid's wheelchairs and started stuffing her mouth full popcorn as fast as she could. Meanwhile all the other baboons were screaming, having a fit in their seats. Judy, the calm mother, went to go get her. If Lee would have got her, Jolie would have known she was in big trouble.

Another time on Garden Bros. Circus, she did it again. The venue was an outside theatre with the audience sitting on the grass. Jolie ran out and started grabbing and eating everything she could, and she made it all the way to the top of the seating. Ian Garden, Sr. saw what was happening and he grabbed the end of her 15-foot leash and gave it to Judy when she caught up with the baboon. Jolie jumped in Judy's arms, and they finished the act.

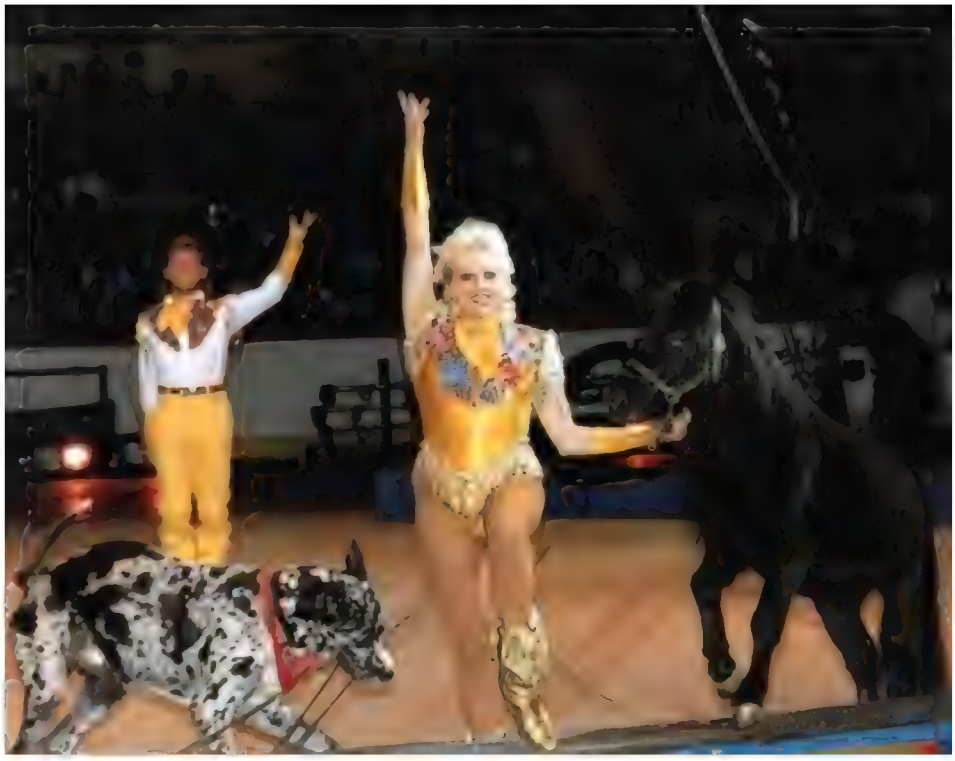
While performing on Ringling, Lee and Judy always made their own costumes and were allowed liberties with choreography and production. Although the show chose the music for the act, Lee created all the sound effects including a big kiss with a baboon and little "splat" sounds to accentuate tricks that the baboons did, even though Ring 1 was more often than not, the farthest ring from the band. Lee with Zsa Zsa in Baraboo, 1995.

A third time, at Madison Square Garden, Jolie jumped on Tina Winn's lap while she was on the trapeze under the motorcycle, waiting for her act to start. The next time she escaped was at the beginning of the show in Madison Square Garden. Ringmaster Jim Ragona was welcoming everyone to the show, and the baboon act followed the opening announcement. Jolie took off, ran up to the ringmaster in the spotlight, and sat on his foot and hugged his boot, looking up at him. Jim was terrified since he had been in Japan with the baboons and knew what they were capable of. Lee got Jolie, and they ran back to the ring to begin the act.

Alexander (left) and Sebastian Mitchell wait for the daily parade to begin at Circus World Museum in 1995.

The author's sister, Emily Parkinson, worked with Lee and Judy at Circus World Museum in 1995. At the beginning of the season, Lee and Judy explained to everyone around the show that it was paramount to not make eye contact with any of the baboons and if one got loose, to just look down. Once Emily was leaving her dressing room to get ready for her act and she heard someone yell, "Baboon loose!" So, Emily turned around and ran back up her dressing room steps, closing the door, just as

Zsa Zsa does a headstand at the top of the perch as Lee looks on and spots her from below.



Judy takes a bow after the finale trick in which her Great Dane, Max, chased the black pony, Rocky, while he jumped hurdles placed around the ring, 1994. Judy said, "There are frustrating times when you're not figuring each other out…and people will say, well what step is next? They'll [the animals] show you what step is next if you're really listening, paying attention and being consistent. The next step shows itself when it's time."

the baboon's face was in the crack of the door. Once again, it was Jolie.

As the Red Unit tour came to a close, Lee and Judy felt certain that they would be invited back for a subsequent tour, but they were not and it "devastated" Lee.

After the 1995 season ended at the Circus World Museum, Clown College began and took residence on the museum property. Lee stayed in Baraboo to work in the wardrobe department for Clown College. During that time, he spoke with Kenneth Feld and others about the possibility of Lee going back to Ringling as performance director. Lee suggested that Judy present the baboons while he acted as performance director, but it seemed to be a conflict of interest. Lee asked Kenneth for a contract, but it was not typical procedure to give contracts for managerial positions. Lee believed his knowledge and experience justified a contract. In the end the subject never advanced, and Lee and Judy did not return to Ringling.

That fall they worked the Evansville Shrine date with the baboons and ponies. It was there that they sold the ponies to Jacqueline Zerbini, along with their truck and trailer and everything associated with the ponies. It was a sad moment for them, especially Judy, but necessary due to the ongoing expense of the ponies. They took the baboons to Piccadilly Circus for about twelve weeks and continued through the fall on Shrine dates for George Coronas.

A New Adventure

Lee never stopped having big dreams, and it was natural for him to think big and see past the many little challenges. Early on, Lee had a finished product in his head. It was Judy's job to find the money and figure out a way to make the idea come to fruition. It started with just a catchy name and a pencil drawing, but soon the Baboon Lagoon crossed them over from circus to fairs, offering a high-quality educational show that made an impact on the fair business. Lee and Judy reflect back now with pride in seeing their new vision come to life – one that they had designed, built, choreographed, and constructed the wardrobe and trained the animals.

The Baboon Lagoon premiered in 1997. It was built on a hydraulic stage that was engulfed with fog and dancing waters when it opened. Complete with state-of-the-art lighting and sound systems, the set was 60 feet across and it was hand painted including the bally cloth around the stage. When the fog drifted away Lee, Judy and their sons dressed as Stanley and Livingston were all standing there with the baboons.

The show featured the baboon act which was nearly the same as the act they had presented on Ringling, paired with an educational component incorporated into a bantering script between Lee and Judy. They also integrated cockatoos, a snake and an African serval named Zulu into the show.

Lee and Judy purchased the eight-week-old serval for

During the Baboon Lagoon performance, Stanley and Livingston returned to the stage with over-sized fishing poles and another magic trick. They said they were going fishing and needed "jungle worms" for bait. They put down the poles, opened the magic box and pulled out a 12-foot snake.

the Baboon Lagoon production. They began to put the exotic cat in a box everyday so that he would get used to it and be prepared when they used him for the magic trick. He slept with the boys in the trailer until he was just under a year old. Then, Lee and Judy realized that Zulu needed his own space and moved him in with the other animals. It took about a year to season him, and they had him for over a decade. He never missed a show – except on one occasion.

Each time that "Stanley and Livingston" came out to interrupt the show, they were preceded by a familiar, catchy tune. While Lee and Judy were on-stage presenting the baboon act, it was the boys' responsibility to load the serval into the magic trick, and then they wheeled the prop out onto the stage. They would say they had gone hunting, but all they could find was a "flat cat," producing a piece of leopard material in the shape of a cat, and eventually magically producing the serval. Judy would then offer educational information to the audience about the exotic cat.

Coloring book for the Baboon Lagoon, illustrated and written by Pat Davison.

One day Lee and Judy were on stage with the baboons and the boys started arguing backstage about who was going to load the serval. The music cue started for the boys to push the trick onto the stage. Lee said, "Sounds like Stanley and Livingston." The boys came on stage as usual, doing their little dance, and Lee said, "Hey what's in the pot?" and Alexander said, "Nothin!" The kids inconspicuously kept trying to make their dad understand that the cat was not in the pot, until finally Lee saw that the pot was empty. Judy went backstage to get the serval to cover the "technical difficulty."

As the Baboon Lagoon was on tour, Lee designed and produced several other midway shows presented on the fair circuit. These included Wild West Follies, Birds of Pineapple Paradise, All the King's Horses, Broadway

to Hollywood (a puppet show) and International Frog Jumping Championships. In addition, the Lee Stevens Agency was formed. It was beneficial that he already had a good repertoire with many of the fair managers.

The Baboon Lagoon developed a tour of regular dates, appearing at the Florida State Fair, fairs in the Carolinas, the Illinois State Fair and the Pennsylvania State Fair. Most dates were ten-day runs.

While on the road with the Baboon Lagoon in 2000, one of Lee's family members was going through a tough time and Lee and Judy took in her two daughters, Madeline (nine years old) and Michelle (two years old). The now family of six continued to travel on the fair circuit while flying back and forth for court dates. Seven years later, Lee and Judy officially adopted the girls.

Lee had started to produce the annual holiday show every winter at the International Independent Showman's Association in Gibsonton. The show was founded by Billy Rogers more than a decade prior, with proceeds always going to local charities. In January 2002, Lee opened the show, welcomed the audience, walked outside, and had a heart attack. He had surgery placing several stents, however, Lee, Judy and their family still finished out the season with the Baboon Lagoon.

Judy presented their African serval, Zulu, in the Baboon Lagoon. In recalling her earliest impressions of performing, Judy said, "I loved being part of the circus. I loved performing and working with the animals and moving the show…it was so stimulating."

They realized that the baboons were getting older and so were they. In addition to Lee's heart issues, Judy could barely walk and was desperate for a hip replacement. Lee stopped booking return dates and they knew that the end of the season would be the end of the Baboon Lagoon. Lee ended up having a second heart attack before the season was over. In 2004, after eight years of performing, the Baboon Lagoon took its final bow.

Lee had always joked that one day he might be forced to become a dog groomer, once his performing days were behind him. At home in Gibsonton, he saw an ad in the paper that someone was selling their dog grooming shop. After Judy urged him to call, Lee bought the establishment two days later.

Lee and Judy continued to keep the baboons on their property, but they started thinking that the animals could have a better life elsewhere. They learned about a private zoo near Ruskin, Florida that housed multiple animals and already had permits for primates. They visited several times to see if it would be the right fit. After the baboons were placed on loan, Lee and Judy visited them once or twice a week. Then after a while Lee did not want to go anymore because the baboons would look at them as if they were saying, "Are we going home now?"

A few years later, they were contacted by a woman whose parents had started Noelle's Chimp Farm in Palm Harbor, Florida, a popular attraction in the 1960s. Their daughter was reviving the small park, and she had a tropical enclosure with waterfalls and palm trees where the baboons could live. Lee and Judy thought the baboons deserved to live in a place like that, especially after what the animals had done for them for so many years – allowing them to have a wonderful performing career. Lee and Judy decided to move the baboons permanently the 45 miles to the sanctuary.

They felt a bit uneasy driving out to transport them to the new place after not seeing the baboons in a long time. When they arrived, three other vans showed up, including two vets and several volunteers wearing "Mommy Monkey" shirts. Lee was furious and told the owners to get rid of everyone. He walked up to the chain linked enclosure and all of the baboons were screaming. Lee started talking to them like he meant business – swearing, yelling, calling them names, shaking the fence – the boss was back! Suddenly, all of the baboons looked at him. Zsa Zsa, the matriarch, walked over to Lee by the gate. He told her to turn around, and she turned and let him put on her leash. Lee knew that since he had her, the rest would follow suit. Only little Shelley would not come out until Judy persuaded her to do so.

Once they were moved, Lee and Judy never returned to see their beloved baboons. It was just too hard for the baboons and for them as well. With some animals such as lions, tigers or horses, it is possible to pass them from one

Lee was twice president of the Showmen's Shrine Club, twice president of the International Independent Showman's Association, and twice president of the Greater Tampa Showmen's Association. He is pictured here announcing at the annual charity show at the Showmen's Club in 2009.

al Independent Showman's Association, which he became president of in 2004. Lee became very involved in an effort to raise funding for a museum to house the equipment and artifacts, which subsequently became a reality.

The Stevens faced a challenge of not having any health insurance in 2009 when Judy was in dire need of a hip replacement. An acquaintance was a recruiting officer at the local prison, and she informed Lee that he could get health insurance for himself and his family, the minute he was accepted into the academy. At the age of 55, Lee thought it was an insane idea, but the officer said that even if he did not graduate, at least while he was in the academy, he could have the insurance and get Judy her much-needed surgery. But Lee could not apply because he did not have a high school diploma. Within a week, he took the GED test without studying and received his GED in the mail. Three weeks later, he began the seven-month academy training. After graduating, he reluctantly became a corrections officer for the next three years, receiving promotions along the way, until the prison closed.

After the prison closed, the Stevens decided to go back on the road and work concessions with the fairs. For roughly a decade, they have had a funnel cake joint in addition to a lemonade tent and a shaved ice stand, sometimes all three at once, and all relatively easy to book.

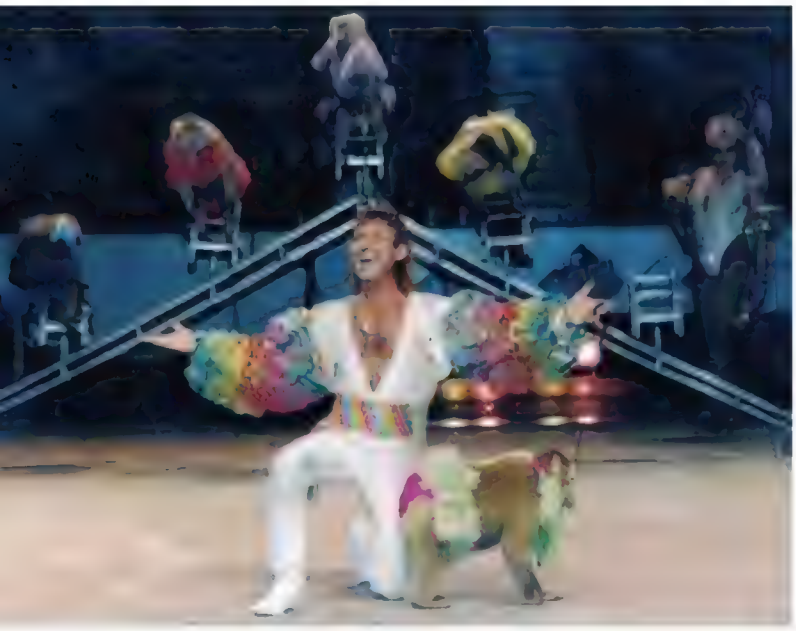
Anyone who knows Lee knows that he is often very direct in his approach with people. Lee attributes this partially to the nature of his New York upbringing, but mostly to his pride in the circus industry and wanting everyone else to be up to the same standard that he holds himself to. After all, Lee had worked most of his life to be at the top of the circus

trainer to another. However, with primates, there is a strong social bond and changes could be detrimental to the animal. Lee and Judy knew that the baboons were now where they belonged, and they were in a fabulous place.

It was very hard to say goodbye to the baboons. Although Lee and Judy felt "empty and finished," they understood that just like your children, you do what is best for the animal, not what makes the owner feel best. The baboons either needed to have a purpose in working and be involved intimately on a daily basis with their trainers or they needed to live in a facility that resembled a natural wild environment.

Lee and Judy continued to run the grooming shop. Then they purchased another property and opened Mr. Lee's Flower Shop for about a year. It was a way for Lee to stay busy and creative while being heavily involved with the Internation-

Lee described Ringling as a living, breathing, incredible fantasy, and his dream had been to someday be a part of it.



Lee and Judy Stevens are seen on the 123rd edition of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey with their nine baboons. For Lee, appearing with The Greatest Show on Earth *fulfilled a life-long ambition.*

world. Judy said, "We were being part of this living breathing incredible fantasy, and the only way you could do it was to do it perfectly."

Lee Stevens had tremendous respect for fellow performers who "filled the ring," especially those who had a special talent to both entertain and connect with the audience. Lee reflects on many of the greats he saw perform, including Gunther Gebel-Williams, Charly Baumann, Wade Burke, Dolly Jacobs, Struppi Hanneford, Tommy Hanneford, Kathy Hanneford and Mark Karoly. His very favorite performers included Rogana, "The way she moved and acted was incredibly beautiful;" Vicki Unus, "She was so classy, she kept her shoes on the entire act;" and The Great Patini, "He was a tiny man that came out with a big cigar, top hat and tails and he did a sway pole act on a lamppost – the guy was spectacular."

Lee thought he was starting a long line of generations of circus performers. Still, Lee and Judy raised their children to be independent, thoughtful and kind, and they did not force them to follow in their footsteps. Today, Alexander, 35, has chosen a different route than show business. He went to seminary and achieved his masters in theology as well as a masters in psychology. He lives in Virginia and works as a child psychologist, family counselor and ordained minister. Sebastian, now 34, left his position with the elephant conservation facility in 2019 and is now taking over the family's concession business. Madeline, 29, lives with her husband, daughter and newborn son. Michelle, 22, is in school for ultrasonography and is in a stenography program. She also shares a love of horses with Judy.

Judy is in her tenth year of owning the grooming shop that now has seven employees. She is proud they have built up a reputable business with a large clientele in Gibsonton that is always busy. Judy is waiting to see what Lee's next big dream will be, and she rolls her eyes when he mentions that a pizza joint might be in their future. Although, no matter what the dream, it is clear that she would find a way to support it. As for Lee, he is waiting to see what the next opportunity will be that God presents.

"I lived the life other people only dream of."

Lee absolutely loved every minute of being with Ringling. When he walked through the back curtain as the lights went down and the big timpani started – it always gave him goosebumps. No matter how he was feeling physically or mentally, the performance and the atmosphere would take over, a feeling that many performers can relate to. Lee hoped his legacy would be to make someone in the seats feel the same way he did when he first saw the circus when he was four or five years old. If he did that, then he had done his job as a performer in touching someone's life. "If I could make one person, one kid in the audience, feel the way I felt when the lights went out in Madison Square Garden, then I did my job." Bw

Acknowledgments

A substantial part of this article was based on recorded audio interviews with Lee and Judy Stevens conducted by the author in Gibsonton, Florida on October 5 and 8, 2021 and January 3, 2022. Thank you to Lee and Judy for graciously providing detailed recollections of their career during more than a dozen hours of interviews. Gratitude is also extended to Jennifer Lemer Posey for scanning and transferring images used to illustrate the Stevens' story.

Endnotes

1. Herbert Clement was the Director of Central Park Children's Zoo in New York until its closing in 1991. He was also a long-time circus fan and authored several books about his zoo and circus experiences.
2. Harry Rawls had a long career with Hugo, Oklahoma based truck shows like Famous Cole, Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. and Carson & Barnes, but he also worked for other circuses including King Bros. where he served as General Manager in 1971.
3. Bill Ballentine (1910-1999) was a professional clown, illustrator, author of ten books and the Dean of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College from 1969-1977.
4. Ted Bowman (1927-1999) began his circus career with the Terrell Jacobs Wild Animal Circus in 1949 as it was featured on the Royal American Shows carnival midway. He also worked for Fairyland Circus, Gil Gray Circus and Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. He served as general manager of Carson & Barnes for 17 years.
5. This and all subsequent quoted sub-headings are attributable to Lee Stevens.
6. A "Three-Day Eventer" is an expression used by equestrians to describe competitions among single horses and riders that include dressage, cross-country and show jumping.
7. Fuzzy Plunkett (1917-1991) trained and presented sea lions for Cole Bros. Circus in the early 1940s and was a prominent North American trainer of seals, dogs, chimps, lions, tigers and elephants for many years.

John Pugh
Part III
A Lifetime with the Circus

by Lane Talburt

"I hated it!"[1] Less than two months into the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. 1965 tour, John W. Pugh was ready to chuck his newly acquired management duties and take the next flight back to his native England. "Everybody was saying, 'That limey. What do you mean you're the assistant manager?' "[2]

The challenges that Pugh faced in 1965 – not the least coping with the unpredictable replacement for Clyde Beatty's signature big cat act – steeled the young manager to confront more threatening obstacles during the next season.

Were it not for Pugh's crafty, behind-the-scenes maneuvering as the newly appointed general manager in 1966, Art Concello may very well have succeeded with his plan to convert Beatty-Cole from tents to indoor venues, just as Ringling had done after 1956. Pugh's ability to stay the course despite repeated attempts to switch to arenas, with the tacit support of chief financial backer Jerry Collins, was testament to his unswerving determination over a 50-year-tenure as a manager and proprietor to maintain Beatty-Cole's status as the "world's largest circus under the big top."

In tackling his duties on the 1965 tour, the 25-year-old neophyte manager faced a steep learning curve. Recovering from a severe leg injury on the trampoline the previous year, John stayed on, persuaded to conduct the sheriff's sale, a pre-show pitch to move customers from general admission to more expensive reserved seats. And he was to do this on crutches no less.

McClosky offers promotion

In early 1965, Pugh was back in England where he had been corresponding with Walter McClosky, the younger brother of managing partner Frank McClosky, about the possibility of returning to Beatty-Cole as performance director. "I got a phone call at two o'clock in the morning. My dad answered and said, 'There's someone on the phone for you in America.' I went down, and it was Frank McClosky. He said, 'John, I just wanted you to know that I got your letter for Walter. He was killed in an auto accident, but we still want you to come.' And that's how I started in management."[3] Pugh's salary was increased to $150 a week, plus cookhouse privileges.

The big top canvas spool truck is seen in action on a sun-filled morning in 1965.

James Cole photograph

Joe Golasso, who performed the one-finger stand and had been a Beatty-Cole manager, left the show at the end of the 1964 season. Galasso's replacement was Harry Anderson, Jr., who with John Pugh, were to be among three new assistant managers under veteran general manager Frank Orman. Harry's father owned Enquirer Printing Co. in Cincinnati, which printed posters for Beatty-Cole and other circuses.

"When I got the offer to return as a manager in 1965, my dad wasn't too happy about it," John admitted. "When I finally worked up the nerve" to divulge his switch from performing to managing, "he told me, 'Well, you've got to get out on your own sometime.' "[4]

But that would not be until young Pugh agreed to assist his father on one last project. "My dad was filming Don Ameche in a studio in Paris." Digger was drawing on John's production experience on ATV Television in London to set the studio for the filming. The famous actor was introducing circus acts that Digger had booked to perform on *International Showtime,* a popular series telecast on NBC in the U.S. "Don Ameche very rarely showed up, and they just put him in front of a set somewhere and edited the scenes into the program footage," John explained. "I told my dad I would stay through the dress rehearsal [in Paris] because I was the stage manager. Then I flew home to London, got my clothes together and took the plane to the states."[5]

"Just as I was getting ready to leave, my dad rang me. I thought he was going to congratulate me." Instead, Digger told his son, " 'Don't forget to buy a return ticket.' And I did; I always did whatever he told me. I came over here, and I can tell you I was ready to go home after the first six weeks. But I could just see myself getting off the plane [in England] and my dad saying, 'I told you so.' And I stuck it out to the end of the year, and that was that."[6]

Though the father-son relationship remained close, Pugh said his father, who had taken young John on many cross-Atlantic trips to book acts on American circuses, never again visited his son on a Beatty-Cole lot. Instead, John made a pilgrimage each off-season to the family's Hounslow homestead in a London suburb. Digger Pugh died there of cancer in 1969.

Ann Arbor, Michigan was treated to the World's Largest Circus Under the Big Top *in August 1965.* Ann Arbor News

Challenged to both manage AND perform

John Pugh took a flight from London to New York in early spring 1965. When he arrived at the Long Island Arena in Commack, New York a surprise awaited him.

"Before I turned up at Commack a few days before the opening performance [on April 15 for an 11-day run], Lucio Cristiani went to Frank McClosky to ask whether I would be available to perform in the Franconi riding act. Lucio needed a replacement." McClosky reportedly told the veteran comedy rider, "'John can do that. He is an acrobat.'"

When McClosky informed Cristiani that Pugh was also a new assistant manager, "Lucio wanted me to do both." – without a boost in his manager's salary of $150. John would be joining an experienced riding troupe that included elephant trainer Rex Williams and his wife, Ava. Lucio, having eschewed the use of his family's name for his troupe, was identified in the circus program simply as "Armando," after one of his sons.

Like so many circus people, Cristiani and Pugh shared a history of performing together at an earlier time on the same show – in this instance the 1948 Cole Bros. rail-based under-canvas outfit. Lucio, the principal performer on the Cristiani Family Riding Troupe, achieved fame for consistently turning backward somersaults from one horse to another. He also observed the Pugh lad's leaping skills on the trampoline. Taking a liking to the youth, Cristiani tutored Pugh in the art of cheating at poker in the family's private rail car. "Lucio placed a mirror underneath a top bunk which would show me the hands of other players sitting on the lower bunk," John mused.

But when faced with Cristiani's request years later to join the Franconi act just two days before the 1965 indoor season opener, Pugh warily asked McClosky, "How long do I have to do this?" "Until you find a replacement," answered the managing director.

"I practiced one day with Lucio," Pugh said. His years of turning flips on the trampoline enabled John to leap from horse to horse and to finesse other bareback tricks. Even

though "Lucio liked what I did," John began to worry about suffering another injury, which a year earlier had sidelined him for three months.

Following his initial practice session with the Cristiani-led troupe, Pugh quickly set off to Manhattan in search of a replacement. He found one on Ringling Bros., which was playing its annual month-long stand at Madison Square Garden. John persuaded a South American equestrian who had been on the Beatty-Cole show during the previous season to immediately take his place in the ring. "Lucio never forgave me for that. He told me, 'You were my best rider.'"[7]

John Pugh served as one of three assistant managers in 1965. He was responsible for all things around and under the big top, including the performance itself. James Cole photograph

Circus laden with aging clowns, bosses

Once John opted out of the arduous bareback routine, he was able to concentrate on his new management responsibilities. Pugh became a manager at a crucial, transitional time for the show. Put simply, the over-the-road outfit was aging, and the show's namesake was critically ill.

To the amazement of many on the cast and crew, the 61-year-old Clyde Beatty arrived at winter quarters in 1965 intending to reprise his famous legendary fighting wild animal act. Beatty had been forced to leave the circus mid-season in 1964 for treatment of what initially was thought to be stomach ulcers, but was later diagnosed as cancer. The marquee performer's four-decade career was rapidly coming to an end.

Frank Orman, Beatty's long-time general manager, was 72. He ran the circus's day-to-day operations. Key department heads, such as superintendent Bob Reynolds and prop boss Tommy Clark, also were reaching retirement age. Others, like big-top boss canvasman George Werner, had only recently quit the road.

Clown alley under Eddie Dullum also was weighted down with aging merrymakers, some of whom had become increasingly less nimble for ring gags requiring frequent pratfalls and foot chases. Young Kenny Dodd was a key addition. With limited clowning but considerable acrobatic experience he had joined in 1961 and later would become boss clown. Dodd also would become one of Pugh's best friends.

To top it off, Frank McClosky, one of three partners, was seldom on site. He remotely guided the outfit from his home in Winter Park, Florida when he was not sailing in the Bahamas. "Frank McClosky lived like a king, let me tell you," Pugh said. "He had a 70-foot boat for sport fishing and spent his summers at Walker's Cay."[8]

The show's principal financier, Jerry Collins, was preoccupied as the owner of dog racing tracks in Sarasota and elsewhere. Due to his political connections as a former Florida legislator and his much-publicized philanthropy, Collins wielded considerable influence in the Sunshine State. More important to Beatty-Cole's ongoing stability, the wealthy investor was chairman of Acme Operating Company, with McClosky as president of the parent circus organization.

A third partner in the under-canvas enterprise, vice president Bonnie Kernan, was the widow of initial partner Walter Kernan, who died unexpectedly in 1963. Her father owned a chain of theaters in the Chicago area, and she had been a showgirl on Ringling Bros., where she met her late husband. Though Mrs. Kernan traveled with the show, she was the least knowledgeable of the trio in circus operations. "Bonnie kind of fiddled around between the office and show operations," Pugh said. "But she realized that she was the hyphen" in the three-way partnership.[9] Mrs. Kernan would be the exposed link that left Beatty-Cole ripe for Art Concello's attempted takeover.

Johnny's primary assignment as a newly appointed

manager was to oversee activities around and under the Beatty-Cole big top, including the performance itself. Wilson Storey continued to scout and contract virtually all acts, with McClosky's approval. Though Pugh excelled in the ring and in various operational tasks, he had no background as a performance director. Following a long-established pattern, he learned the ropes through trial and error.

Pugh's overlapping duties

Pugh was designated to be one of three assistant managers reporting to GM Frank Orman in 1965. Harry Anderson Jr. managed the "front end," Pugh was responsible for big top performances and related operations, and Alan "Buster" Odle was the announcer. Orman himself was rumored to be retiring soon.[10]

The lack of clearly delineated responsibilities created confusion among the trio of managers. As to whether he was the actual performance director, Pugh responded hesitantly: "Yes and no. The performance was put together by the show, and I just kept an eye on it."[11] Pugh said he also oversaw the side show activities, but not the money. Nor was he aware of the front door ticket count or proceeds from the advance. Concession sales were also off limits to the green manager.

Years later Pugh downplayed Odle's managerial significance. "I realized fairly quickly that he didn't know what he was doing," Pugh opined. "He'd been around some shows, but when it came to decisions, I had to make them." Conversely, Pugh said personal and professional relations were good with Harry Anderson Jr. "He was my age. He and I were good buddies."[12]

As the 1965 tour opened, Pugh continued as Orman's driver on overnight jumps, a task he inherited following his injury in 1964. "I lived in the front end of the snake show. Harry had a car and an Airstream trailer. And then Harry wrecked the trailer and we brought up Clyde's Cadillac and trailer [from winter quarters]. So, Harry and I split Clyde's trailer.[13]

"Harry relieved me when I was taking a break from my duties, and I relieved him. And Harry would always follow the fleet, which meant I got off the lot earlier. I guess that was the start of my leaving most lots early," Pugh chuckled. "But if there was bad weather, naturally I stayed there to see that the show got off the lot." This was a pattern that John would follow in later years as general manager and owner; he left at intermission on the closing night and drove to the next lot to oversee the morning set up.

At the outset of the tour, Clyde Beatty resumed his strenuous cage performance despite his slowly succumbing to the ravages of cancer, diagnosed in the previous summer. But a month after the opening on Long Island, Beatty became too weak to continue with his act and was forced to return to his home in Ventura, California. He died there on July 19. Jerry Collins represented the circus as a pallbearer at Beatty's funeral.

Beatty's replacement was Joseph "Red" Hartman who filled in the previous season when the veteran trainer had been forced to leave the show to seek treatment for cancer. Hartman performed with fewer big cats, and he drew mixed reviews. Only days after Beatty's final exit, a Scranton, Pennsylvania newspaper offered a glowing appraisal of Hartman's routine:

> "The disappointment of the crowd when Clyde Beatty, best known of all wild animal trainers, failed to appear soon ended when Beatty's protégé, entered the cage in the center ring…Hartman, a 36-year-old native of St. Louis, Missouri proved a superior sub-

Captain Astronaut was fired from this "X-15 Apollo rocket" to close each performance of the 1965 season. The human cannonball's real name was Luis Munoz. James Cole photograph

stitute. He worked with five lions and three tigers, including Princess, 'the world's only rollover tiger.'... The act was well-received by the crowd."[14]

A review of the act in a Davenport, Iowa publication was lukewarm: "Joseph "Red" Hartman is generally accepted as doing a good job...He is no Clyde Beatty."[15]

What the public reviews and interviews with Red Hartman did not reveal were the problems he presented to Pugh and others both in and out of the ring.

"Red was a very capable performer; he was a nice guy," Pugh recalled, adding that "the trouble with Red was you never knew when he was going to be sober. And sometimes he wasn't sober enough. He'd come into the ring and want to fight the guys. In those days I was pretty rough and ready, and I must have nailed him a dozen times."[16]

One confrontation stood out in Pugh's recollections. "Red came out onto the connection and started screaming at me. He was complaining that the candy butchers shouldn't be working the grandstands while he was working in the ring," a standard practice during Beatty's ring time. "I decked him."[17]

Reflecting on his pugilistic abilities during a 2010 newspaper interview, John said, "When I first started as a manager, I guess I was a pretty rough guy... When you get older, you can't outfight them or outrun them [the working crew], so you have to outsmart them."[18]

Toward the end of the season, trapeze performer Greta Frisk fell from her center ring act, but avoided serious injury. Greta had just started her act during the final Miami performance. Apparently, the trapeze bar was damp and slippery due to an all-day rain. At "the sweep end" of her swing she purposefully let go in "a flip-around motion." As she grasped for the bar, she was unable to hold on, and she fell feet first. Her German husband raced forward and broke her fall. Both refused to go to the hospital. Pugh said "it was a magnificent catch."[19]

The 1965 Beatty-Cole tour ended on November 7 at St. Petersburg, covering 12,584 miles in 20 states in the eastern portion of the U.S. Afterward, Pugh returned to England for his customary winter family reunion. Pending events would see his circus star rising but also put his and the show's' future at risk.

A slugfest for control

The 1966 Beatty-Cole circus program boasted the three-ring performance was being produced and directed by Frank McClosky and Arthur M. Concello. In reality, Concello was firmly in command, and Frank McClosky was isolated, fearful of being spotted around any lot for an agonizing nine months. And Johnny, whose name topped the program's list of key circus staff, was caught in the middle of a battle between the two former close friends. McClosky owed his forced abdication to a game-changing transaction involving Mrs. Kernan in late 1965.

"Mrs. Kernan decided to sell her one-third share of the circus," Pugh recalled, "and that's when Art Concello came in and bought it. And of course, then you had Jerry Collins, Frank McClosky and Art owning the show – a three-partner show which is a very dangerous thing to have."[20]

Unlike McClosky, who in recent years had directed circus operations from his home in Winter Park, Concello became an on-site fixture at Beatty-Cole winter quarters and frequently traveled with the show.

Tom Parkinson, circus historian and former writer for *The Billboard*, elaborated on what he termed as "probably the biggest spot news story in the business" in his analysis of the 1966 circus season for the Circus Historical Society's journal.

> "The association [Concello] made with Frank McClosky and associates in December was revealed in February. McClosky, Concello and Jerry Collins owned the Clyde Beatty & Cole Bros. Circus. The first two owned King Bros., having bought out Bob Snowden and installed James M. Cole as manager. Together with Bill English they held the Sells & Gray Circus, too."[21]

And that was the fly in the ointment for millionaire Jerry Collins, who had been the heavyweight financier in the original purchase of the Beatty-Cole show. "Jerry was mad at Frank and Walter," Pugh noted, "for forming the King and Sells & Gray shows, not cutting him in on the deal, and using the money from the Beatty show to build the two shows, and the Beatty show's agents to book them." In addition, Pugh said McClosky was getting a cut from the office wagon. Thus, it was no surprise that Collins had thrown his support behind Concello.[22]

"What do you mean congratulations?"

Pugh had heard rumors of the impending shake up during his annual British family visit, but was caught flatfooted when informed of his promotion.

> "When Art came on the show, I was in England. When I flew back, and when I walked into winter quarters, everybody said 'Congratulations.' I said, 'Whoa. Wait a minute. What do you mean congratulations?' Well, they said, 'They made you the general manager.' And I said, 'What happened to Frank Orman?' They said, 'Art didn't want Frank around this show, and so they suggested you.' And I said, 'This is really ridiculous. Here I am one year as assistant manager and the next I'm the general manager of the damn show. It took a little time to wake up as to what was going on. Art was trying to take over the whole show. Yes, I was the general manager, but Art had his own people there, and it was a battle between me and them every day.
>
> "Everybody warned me that Art was still mad at

McClosky for stealing the [Clyde Beatty railroad circus] from underneath him in Deming, New Mexico in 1956. That was common knowledge. I was sitting down with McClosky when he invited me to come to his house, and I said to him, 'I understand Art is still mad at you.' And he said, 'Well, he's not mad at me. We cut up too much money on Ringling."[23]

"You go back to the last days of the Ringling show under canvas. Art Concello and Frank McClosky were the chief honchos at the time. There were two of the most beautiful seat wagons on that show. The wagons didn't show up on the train manifest. They didn't show up on the tent seat lists. These were their personal seats. They belonged only to them. And that's how they earned their money.

"I remember Frank telling me that one time [in 1951] they were shooting *The Greatest Show on Earth,* and Cecil DeMille would come down to winter quarters and say, 'We want this set up.' And you know, film companies came in early because they had to set the lights and everything like that. Well, Frank and Art decided they were going to put the screws to DeMille, so they didn't set up. So, DeMille came on and said, 'What's the matter?' Frank said, 'Art and I want a new Cadillac before we do any more work around here.' Of course, DeMille went straight to John Ringling North, and North raised hell with these two guys. But that was the kind of deals they would pull."[24]

A mitigating factor in McClosky being retained on the Ringling payroll may have been his early ties to North at Yale University, per a newspaper report in 1957.

> "Frank was born in Norwich, Connecticut [actually born in Monson, Massachusetts] and following his [high school] graduation came to Bridgeport and went to work at [Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey] during the last years the circus wintered here. He learned the circus business…and knew the operations of every department before being appointed general manager by John Ringling North, who he knew back in the latter's college days at Yale."[25]

Both Concello and McClosky had held top positions on Ringling during the 1940s and into the early 1950s. McClosky was second in command to Concello in the Big One's executive suite at Sarasota. According to another account, "Concello and McClosky were always close friends and close workers."[26]

Two years after this 1953 article appeared, North fired McClosky and Walter Kernan from their posts in the aftermath of Concello having been shown the door. Two other Ringling managers and a host of ring hands immediately quit in sympathy with McClosky and Kernan. Among those who followed McClosky and Kernan onto the Beatty railer – and remained loyal on the reorganized Beatty-Cole show – were lot superintendent Bob Reynolds and prop boss Tommy Clark. They continued to serve under McClosky when

In 1966, Rex Williams (seen at the right in the red coat) directed eleven elephants across the three rings of Beatty-Cole's big top, while riding on horseback. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library

Concello assumed operational control in 1966.

"These were McClosky's people – treasurer Edna Antes, Bob Reynolds and Tommy Clark. And I was a McClosky man."

From the outset "I think Art underestimated me," Pugh ventured. "He thought, 'Here's a guy that was a kinker one year and assistant manager the next year. And now we've made him general manager.' And all of a sudden they were throwing me to the lions."

Pugh actually had two factors working in his favor with Concello. First, Art lived with Maggie Smith "one of the Wallaby girls that my dad brought to Ringling" to be a showgirl. Ms. Smith would become Mrs. Concello much later following the death of Art's illustrious former aerial partner, Antoinette Concello. And second, Art more than likely chose the 27-year-old Pugh for the GM post because "a performer becoming a manager on the circus in those days, you know, what does that guy know about anything?"

Concello had an ulterior motive for taking over Beatty-Cole, according to Pugh. "Art was going to put that show, the minute he took over, in buildings. He had made a deal with Madison Square Garden to put the show in there the next spring. Knock the Ringling show out."

Despite growing concerns, "I thought Art was going to be great for the show. I really did. He was in winter quarters and with us on the road." Without question, Concello added spit and polish to both the performance roster and the circus physical plant. "He put the show together; he put on a good show."

Circus adds Bale family, Dave Hoover

To enhance the big top roster, Concello inserted former Ringling Bros. stalwarts, the multi-talented Bale family, headed by Trevor Bale as the new equestrian director. Circus audiences were treated to the routines of siblings Elvin Bale, an aerial daredevil billed as "the Magnificent Melvor," and equestriennes Gloria, Bonnie and Dawnita Bale, the latter being Elvin's twin sister. Returning acts included Greta Frisk, Lucio Cristiani's Franconi riding troupe, the Freilani's acrobatic routines, and the Beatty-Cole herd of elephants, directed across three rings by Rex Williams on horseback. The Flying Gaonas replaced Luis Munoz's human cannonball act as the finale.

With the exit of Beatty's temporary successor, Red Hartman, the circus was introducing a new personality in the steel arena. Newspaper ads were altered to herald "Clyde Beatty's Trained Wild Animals, Presented by Capt. Dave Hoover." Though virtually unknown to Beatty's legion of fans, the 36-year-old native of Middletown, Iowa was destined to be a crowd favorite for two decades. Hoover came aboard with eight lions and two tigers which he initially showcased in a smaller steel arena that he also owned.

Concello ordered a larger cage built to embellish the show's cornerstone presentation. In addition, he designed and installed an improved lighting system for the big top interior. Another Concello-designed enhancement was a new set of retractable seat wagons. "They were gigantic things, built of steel, and we had to have them reinforced. They were built in [Concello's] shop in Sarasota and sent up to us in DeLand. And then we had to send them to a local shop operated by Charlie Harris to get them to work."[27]

Concello running the meter

The seat wagons attracted the attention of a news reporter on hand to observe the setup in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. "A modern circus feather is the power-operated bleachers which are driven right into the big top by a semi-trailer and then unfolded into place mechanically by simply pressing a few levers."[28] All the while Concello was "running the meter," submitting a steady stream of invoices associated with his ambitious upgrades.

To ensure that he was getting his share of the revenues, Art "put his half-sister [Grace Killian] in the office wagon with Edna Antes. He had her rooming with Edna. And Grace was getting first count of the money. She used to grab the

John Pugh inherited the assignment of driving Clyde Beatty's Airstream trailer to each new lot. Although he never admitted to it, "Big Don" was reported to have intentionally damaged the trailer during a broader effort to run Pugh off the show.

John Pugh Collection

money every day," Pugh asserted. The two had worked side-by-side on the 1946 Clyde Beatty Railroad Circus, Grace serving as paymaster and Edna selling tickets and working on the tax box.

Pugh's relationship with Concello rapidly deteriorated. "Art tried to ignore me. I put the tent up. That was all he cared about."[29] But the level of hostilities between the McClosky loyalists and Concello's imported replacements festered into open warfare.

Concello brought "Big Don" into the backyard to be the enforcer. Pugh said he could not recall the tough's last name, but described him as "a gigantic guy."

In one incident "that was caused by Don, I had parked my car and trailer next to the ape show, and he decided to squeeze the pole wagon between me and the trucks, and he cut my trailer. I wasn't there at the time. I was busy, and all of the sudden, I heard somebody saying, 'One of the trucks has hit your trailer.' Not unexpectedly, Don refused to accept blame for the mishap.[30]

"Everybody was scared"

That was a relatively minor part of a relentless campaign.

> "The things that went on...were unbelievable. They were wrecking trucks. They tried to burn down the cookhouse. They beat the daylights out of people that weren't their people. Everybody was scared. I won't say they didn't threaten to kill me, because they did. They were trying to run me off..."[31]

The enforcer also targeted the show's prop boss. "Tommy Clark got his head beat in with a stake, a steel stake by that Big Don. And he was going to leave the show, but I talked him into staying. I said, 'We'll straighten this out.' "

McClosky was powerless to intervene and according to Pugh, "Jerry Collins didn't want anything to do with it. Frank was frightened to come around the show. And can you imagine how bad the communications were? The way he communicated with me was to send a telegram to Western Union with money to get a cab driver to come out to the lot with instructions for me to call him," normally from a pay telephone.

The level of intimidation worsened.

> "They let the air out of my tires and smashed the rear window of my car. They slashed the tire on my trailer, and a lot of other things. I carried a gun with me all the time. Don used to say to me, 'I'm going to catch you without your gun.' And I said, 'I sleep awake with my eyes wide open, and I have the gun in hand all the time."[32]

Payback time for Big Don and Concello's other minions was not far off. The controversy was coming to a head among the principals in Florida, and Pugh was in position to play a critical behind-the-scenes role in the end game.

> "He [McClosky] used to say to me, 'Look out. They're trying to take my show.' And he admitted that Art almost broke him, cut him off from the money. What I finally talked Frank McClosky into doing was to go and make peace with Jerry Collins. And then no matter what Art Concello did – even if he didn't want them to buy him out, he's the dead man in the water."[33]

Concello loses takeover bid

The matter was settled in late August:

> SARASOTA (AP) "Ownership of the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, largest in America under canvas, yesterday [August 28] passed into the hands of Jerry Collins and Frank McClosky. Collins announced that he and McClosky, who held a majority of the stock, had bought out the shares of Arthur M. Concello, giving them joint ownership of the big show and two others, Sells-Gray and King Bros. circuses. Purchase price was not disclosed.
>
> "Collins, who owns greyhound tracks in Sarasota, Orlando and at Sioux Falls, S.D., said Concello, former star of the flying trapeze and later executive vice president of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, had resigned as director of the corporation.
>
> "McClosky, former general manager of the Ringling Circus, will continue as managing director of the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, Collins said. It is now in the Chicago area."[34]

The financial terms of the settlement were not disclosed. But for the second time in a decade, Concello failed in his quest to outwit McClosky and to set a new course for the tented show.

On the other hand, Collins was not willing to close the door on future indoor excursions. That same AP report disclosed the depth of Collins intentions. "Negotiations have been opened with Madison Square Garden in New York and 28 other auditoriums and arenas for 1967, Collins said."[35]

Collins declared in a mid-September interview with a Sioux Falls insider "the Beatty circus next season will travel in two motorized caravans – an indoor unit and an outdoor tent show. He added that Madison Square Garden in New York City had made an offer for the Beatty circus to show there."

In light of Art Concello's failure to secure Beatty-Cole under his wings, however, the Garden mavens eventually withdrew from negotiations with Concello and others. Ringling-Barnum continued its highly profitable connections with the Manhattan arena and Collins' dream of booking Beatty-Cole into buildings remained unfulfilled for more than a decade to come.

Dave Hoover's first performance on Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. was in Commack, Long Island at the beginning of the 1966 season. This photo recorded that performance. James Cole photograph

McClosky, Pugh evict Concello's people

On the heels of the settlement with the former Ringling executive and Concello's ouster, McClosky and Pugh set out to clean house on the touring show. The culling began on September 7 on the show's lot at the Kankakee, Illinois fairgrounds. "Frank was staying in Evansville, Indiana, where the Anchor tent company was located." Pugh said McClosky did not come on the lot but sent a cab driver with a note summoning Pugh to a motel where McClosky was staying.

"Frank had a meeting with me. He told me which people to run off. He told me, 'You need to run these people off before they destroy it. They'll destroy it before they leave.' Art wasn't there when I ran his crew off the fairgrounds in Kankakee."[36]

Big Don was at the top of John's list. The troublemaker was unceremoniously ushered off the Kankakee show site at gunpoint before the morning dawned on September 7. In short order, Grace Killian and the remaining Concello staffers cleared out.

In a sign that Beatty-Cole stalwarts wanted a return to the normalcy of pre-Concello days, "almost at once the hue and cry came up to bring back Frank Orman" as general manager, noted Tom Parkinson in his post-season report.[37] Orman's wife of many years had died during the 1966 tour, leaving the veteran manager alone to mourn her absence in their Fort Lauderdale home.

"He came on to help me," Pugh recalled. "He said, 'I don't know what to do with myself, so I go to the racetracks. Would you have any objections to me coming on the show?'"

McClosky restored Orman to his former position. He retained the GM title for the 1967 season. However, Pugh said, "I was still the general manager, believe me. I just carried on in doing what I did because Orman never came out."[38] Pugh was particularly disturbed by this turn of events, as he had steered circus operations through "the year from hell" in 1966.[39]

The stressful 1966 season had opened in Commack, New York, on April 7 and closed in St. Petersburg, Florida, on November 6, covering 11,508 miles.

Ruminating in 2021 about the battle to scuttle Concello's plot, Pugh said, "I saved the [Beatty-Cole tented] circus for the fans." At the same time, he also claimed that "I saved Ringling Bros." by knocking the props from Concello's scheme to deprive the Big One of its highly profitable month-long spring dates at Madison Square Garden.

Two decades later – and five years after selling the circus to Pugh – Jerry Collins expressed similar thoughts: "I saved the circus world," he said. After all, the one-time used car salesman-turned-millionaire had underwritten the resurrection of the bankrupt Clyde Beatty Circus in 1956 and poured funds into Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros Circus for the next three decades.[40] BW

Acknowledgements

Once again, the author is grateful to John Pugh for candidly sharing his experiences as an assistant manager and general manager on the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus. Additional materials and images were provided by Timothy Noel Tegge, James Cole, Fred Pfening III and Illinois State University's Special Collection at the Milner Library.

Coming Up

Johnny Pugh is tested by a major tent collapse trapping several thousand spectators in upstate New York. A newcomer sloughs off John's approach, neither realizing they will be tethered in marriage in the not-too-distant future. Digger Pugh's death stirs John's memories of lessons learned at the side of his globe-trolling father. Dissatisfied with his status on Beatty-Cole, Pugh is ripe for an offer by Irvin Feld to cast his lot with *The Greatest Show on Earth.* He welcomes elephant trainer Freddie Logan and clown/ringmaster-to-be Jimmy James to the ever-changing roster of crowd favorites. John finds himself isolated from the critically ill and dying Frank McClosky amid desperate attempts to keep winter quarters workers fed and to raise warning flags over the floundering show's plight.

The Beatty-Cole elephants enjoying their morning hay as the circus was being set up on August 10, 1965.
Ann Arbor News

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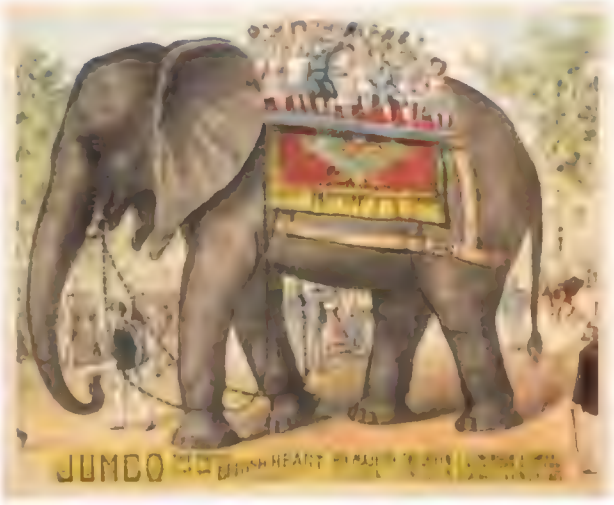

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